

PLUCK AND LUCK

STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

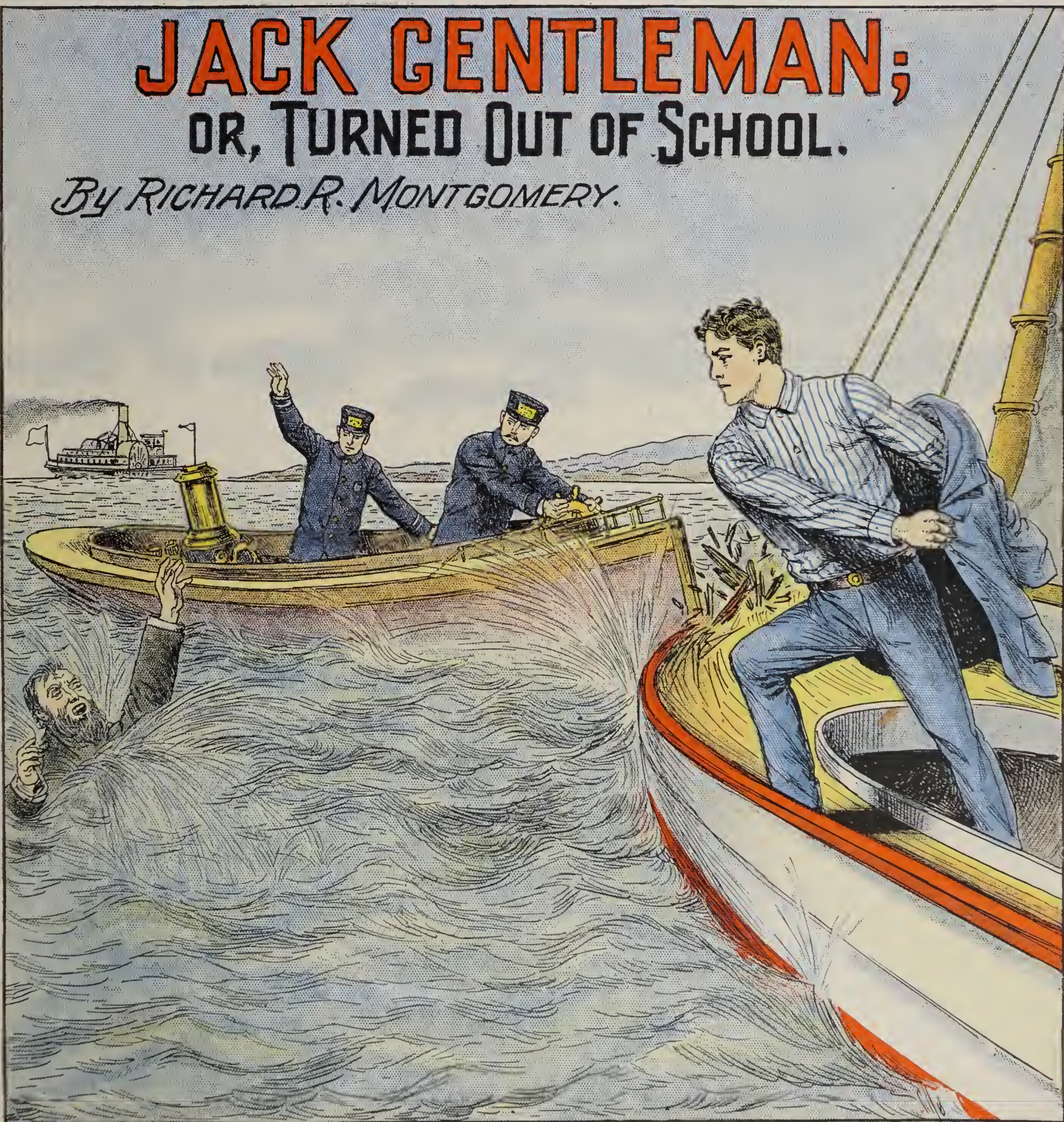
No. 583.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 4, 1909.

Price 5 Cents.

JACK GENTLEMAN; OR, TURNED OUT OF SCHOOL.

By RICHARD R. MONTGOMERY.



Without an instant's hesitation Jack threw off his hat, coat, and shoes, and, plunging into the bay, swam with a bold overhand stroke for his drowning enemy. Not one boy in fifty would have done it. But Jack was a gentleman.

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JACK GENTLEMAN

—OR—

TURNED OUT OF SCHOOL

By Richard R. Montgomery

CHAPTER I.

"PRINCE MUTTONHEAD" HAS A FALL.

"Look out there, Prince! You'll run her down!"

"Don't care if I do! Let her get out of our way! What right has she to be blocking up the road?"

"Hold on! Sheer off, Muttonhead! Don't you know she's deaf and can't hear your bell! There! He's done it! I knew he would!"

"Oh, what a shame!"

"It's outrageous!"

"Is the poor thing hurt?"

These and sundry other exclamations proceeded from the young girls of the bicycling party.

Certainly it was a shame to run down poor "Crazy Lucy," and tumble her into the ditch by the roadside, but that's what Prince Munton had done.

Equally certain was it that the accident would not have happened if Prince had heeded Jack Rayburn's warning cry.

Prince was in the lead of the merry party of boys and girls, all pupils of Baymore Academy, out for a morning spin on their wheels, and as he was a most expert rider—quite a crack, in fact—there was no need of striking the poor old soul; all he had to do was to turn aside and give her the road.

But Prince Munton was proud and naturally of a surly disposition. His friends—perhaps we had better say his toadies—thought him a fine fellow because he was tall and good-looking, and always had a pocket full of money to spend, for Colonel Munton, his father, was a Wall street speculator, and supposed to be rich. If he had given his son no money at all it would have been a great deal better, for Prince was proud enough without it, and the possession of so much cash only made him worse. He loved to throw it around and cut a big splurge. Some called him tricky, and every one of the Baymore boys, his own friends included, knew that he was not above a mean action if it was likely to serve his purpose, but even Jack Rayburn, who heartily disliked him, did not suppose him small enough to do a thing like this.

Crazy Lucy, who tramped about Baymore selling knick-knacks, out of a basket, and never doing anyone any harm,

was certainly the last person for Prince Munton to vent his spite upon.

She was trying to pick herself up when Jack Rayburn ran to her assistance. Her basket had been upset and the contents scattered about, part on the grass and part in the ditch.

"Come on," shouted Prince. "What's the use bothering with the old hag. If she don't want to be run down let her keep out of my way."

There was barely time to make Baymore Academy before the bell rang, and it was probably for that reason that most of the bicycling party—even the young ladies who had been so loud in their expressions of pity—showed a disposition to follow Prince.

In fact, Jack Rayburn was the only one who dismounted.

He tenderly helped the old woman out of the ditch, getting his feet all wet and muddy in doing so, and then began to assist her to gather up her things and replace them in the basket.

"There you are again!" cried Fred Fielding, wheeling about and returning to lend a hand. "That's Jack Gentleman all over. Let's help him, boys. As for you, Prince, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and you know it, too!"

Of course, Prince Munton knew it. If he didn't he must have been very dumb, for all hands now returned and dismounted, those who were nearest helping Jack in his kindly work.

Apparently the proud boy of Baymore was affected by the lesson he had received, for he also lent a hand, and began picking up the papers of needles and pins, cards of buttons and spools of thread.

Very likely this was only because pretty Nettie Harker had been loudest in the outcry against him, and Prince, in common with every other boy in Baymore, always wanted to stand well in Nettie's eyes.

"What a fuss about nothing! The woman ain't hurt!" he growled. "Anyhow, it was only an accident. I couldn't help running her down."

They all heard it, but nobody said a word. Even Nat Mc-Millan, Dave Wright and Gus Penny, who were always ready

to back Prince right or wrong, were silent, for everyone knew that he could have avoided the collision just as well as not.

Crazy Lucy understood the situation, too, and she was not backward in letting Prince know.

"Kape your dirty hands off my things!" she cried. "Sure an' you're a murtherin' scamp! Ye'd hove killed me and let me die in the ditch. Arrah, this is the gintleman! This is the gintleman. I won't forgit him! No, I won't forgit!"

She patted Jack on the shoulder and picked up her basket.

What she had said of the boy was only what everybody said.

Jack Rayburn was a born gentleman, if ever there was one. He was always doing this sort of thing.

If anyone was in trouble Jack was always ready to help them. If the person was poor, old or suffering, he was readier still.

It had always been so ever since Jack came to Baymore. His first consideration was for others, his last for himself.

If a boy was being persecuted Jack always stood up for him; if the boy was slighted because he was poor, and could not dress as well as his school fellows, because he stuttered, or was slow about his lessons, or backward in the school sports, Jack stood up for him all the more.

Boys are quick to recognize these things, and before Jack Rayburn had been six months in Baymore Academy he was nicknamed "the gentleman," and now it had been turned into "Jack Gentleman," which was certainly better than "Mutton-head," Prince Munton's nickname, by which half the boys in Baymore called him behind his back, although on account of his father's wealth and influence few dared to say it to his face.

Everybody but the toadies laughed at Crazy Lucy's outburst.

"Oh, it's all right, Lucy," said Jack. "What I did was nothing, and you mustn't be too hard on my friend here, for I don't believe he really meant to run you down."

"Yes, he did! Yes, he did! I'll make him pay for it! Let me see now—have I everything? Here's me pins, me needles, me tape, and—och, wurra! Where's me green bag? Oh, I've been robbed! I've been robbed, an' he's the wan what's done it! I know he found it in the grass!"

Screaming this out at the top of her voice, the old woman made a rush for Prince, and would have struck him with her basket if Dave Wright and Gus Penny hadn't caught her and held her back.

Jack stared at Prince in amazement.

Just an instant before Crazy Lucy discovered her loss, he had seen him pick up something out of the grass and slyly slip it into his pocket, and yet mean as he had known Prince Munton to be at times, Jack hardly believed that he could be guilty of such an action as that of which he was now accused.

Yet there was the bunch in his pocket. Jack could see it, and Prince stood against the fence looking very pale.

"Hold her, boys, till I can get on my wheel!" he stammered. "I don't want to have any muss with her. It's all nonsense to say that I stole her bag!"

"You did—you did! I know you did!" screamed Lucy, struggling to free herself. "Oh, young gentleman—you are a gentleman—it's all the money I have in the world! Help me now and make him give it up!"

Prince started for his wheel, but Jack, seized with a sudden conviction that he was making no mistake, sprang in front of him and held up both hands.

"Show what you've got in your right-hand pocket, Prince Munton!" he cried. "For the honor of Baymore Academy this thing must be explained!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Prince, paler than ever. "Stand out of my way, Jack Rayburn! Do you accuse me of being a thief?"

"Oh, don't, Jack! Don't!" cried Nettie Harker.

"Surely, Prince wouldn't do such a thing," put in Celia Perry.

"Of course, it's a mistake," said Laura Patterson; "but Prince ought to show what he has in his pocket and prove Jack wrong."

"I won't!" roared Prince, aiming a furious blow at Jack. "I won't be insulted like this!"

He made a mistake.

Jack Gentleman was one of the most athletic boys in Baymore Academy, and a splendid wrestler.

The next Prince knew he was sprawling on the grass, with Jack's foot upon him.

"Search him, boys!" cried Jack. "If I've made a mistake, I'll consent to be drummed out of school!"

Fred Fielding, Will Barmore, and Caspar Arnold sprang to Jack's assistance.

Prince struggled furiously, but it was no use.

While the others held him, Fred pulled the green bag out of his right-hand pocket.

"That's mine! That's mine!" cried Crazy Lucy. "Arrah, sure and I knew he was a thafe!"

As everyone had seen the bag a dozen times, for the old woman as often carried it in her hand as in her basket during her wanderings, there was no one to question it, and it was promptly restored to her.

"I'm done," said Jack, quietly. "Get up, Prince; there's no use lying there—we've all got your measure now."

"It's all a mistake," stammered Prince. "I didn't know it was hers. I found it in the grass."

But there was no one left to listen to him except the toadies, for the boys and girls all mounted their wheels and went spinning back to school.

"What in the world made you do a thing like that, Prince?" said Gus Penny, disgustedly, as the crestfallen boy staggered to his feet.

Crazy Lucy, having recovered her precious pack, which did not contain over a dollar or two at the most, was now traveling down the road as fast as she could go.

"Don't talk to me, Gus," growled Prince. "I should think you might know me better than to suppose that I would steal the bag. How was I to know it belonged to the old hag? It wasn't lying with the other things, but away off by itself."

"You might have known," said Gus, shortly. "I should."

"Well, I didn't, and I ain't going to stand being called a thief. Anybody is liable to make a mistake. I meant to hand the bag over to Professor Smallman and let him advertise it. I tell you I won't stand this sort of thing quietly. No, I won't."

"Mebbe you'll have to," replied Gus, mounting his wheel. "I tell you what, Prince Munton, I've always stood by you until now, but I'll be hanged if I can stand a thing like this."

"You don't have to," snarled Prince. "I've always done the square thing by you, Gus Penny, but I'm through now. Go on and join your friend, Jack Gentleman, and tell him from me that I'll make him sweat for this. My father owns Baymore Academy, and don't you forget it. I'll have him turned out of school!"

It was no idle threat.

All the boys at Baymore knew that Professor Smallman was deeply in Colonel Munton's debt.

Moreover, Mr. Smallman was well named, being small by nature as well as by name, and as thorough a toady to the rich Wall street speculator as ever Gus Penny had been to his son.

But Gus had had enough of the toadying business to last him for some time to come.

"I'm through with you forever, Prince Munton!" he called back, and away he went spinning down the road, leaving

Prince with his friends, Nat McMillan and Dave Wright, to follow or not, just as they pleased.

CHAPTER II.

TURNED OUT OF SCHOOL.

"Jack Rayburn, step this way!"

It was Professor Smallman, principal of Baymore Academy who spoke.

When the professor chose he could make his voice sound most disagreeable; evidently he was in that mood now, for it sounded very disagreeable indeed.

Jack rose in his seat and quietly walked past his school fellows, taking his place in front of the raised platform upon which the principal's desk stood.

He thought he knew what was coming and he had prepared himself for the ordeal.

Therefore he was not at all surprised when Professor Smallman said:

"Jack Rayburn, I understand that you struck Prince Munton this morning. Is it a fact?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, looking the principal straight in the eye.

"I am also told that, not satisfied with assaulting him, you stamped on him after he was down, injuring him severely. Is that also a fact?"

"No, sir."

"Have a care, young man! I always insist upon the truth here. I am well informed in this matter. Take time to think."

"I don't need any time to think. I can answer now. It is not the truth."

"Do you mean to tell me that I lie?" roared the professor, hammering the desk with his rattan.

"You can take it as you please, sir. You ask me for the truth, and I've given it to you. What's more, I shan't give you anything else."

Professor Smallman glared. He tried to reply, but his voice choked. It was easy to see that he was working himself up into a furious rage.

It was directly after the afternoon session. The big glass doors separating the class rooms had been thrown open, and every boy and girl in Baymore Academy could see and hear all that was going on.

Prince Munton, whose seat was well down in front, sat looking straight at Jack, with an ugly sneer upon his face.

Prince had played his trump card, and it is safe to say that he felt sure of winning the game.

"Come, come, young man!" said the professor, finding his voice at last. "This sort of thing won't do. You have committed a cowardly assault upon one of your school fellows. Not satisfied with that, you take mean advantage of a trifling circumstance, wholly unimportant in itself, to accuse him of robbery, and demean him in the eyes of all his companions. This sort of thing cannot be permitted, and I now order you to apologize to Master Munton before the whole school."

"Which I won't," said Jack, promptly, "not if I know it."

"None of your slang to me, sir!" roared Mr. Smallman. "I won't tolerate it. Prince Munton, step this way!"

Prince looked very much as if he had rather be excused, but as there was no help for it, he reluctantly left his seat and went up to the platform.

"Now, then, you can settle this in two minutes," said the professor. "Apologize to Prince, Jack Rayburn, and I will pass this over, but beware how you do such a thing again."

"I won't," said Jack, firmly. "It is no use to ask me, Mr. Smallman. I feel that I am in the right, and——"

"Hold your tongue! You are not to talk. Apologize!"

"Can't I explain, sir? There are plenty here who saw the whole transaction. Prince knocked Crazy Lucy down, and he

did pocket her money bag. I saw him do it. Fred Fielding will tell you——"

Whack! Whack!

Down came the rattan upon Jack's head and shoulders.

Very foolishly Professor Smallman lost control of his temper entirely, and made a rush for Jack.

He better have kept it.

In a twinkling Jack wrenched the rattan from the principal's hands and broke it in two, throwing the pieces over Prince Munton's head.

In the struggle for the possession of the stick, Professor Smallman tripped over the edge of the platform and fell sprawling.

Somehow or other he managed to strike against Prince, and he went down, too.

All in a moment the big schoolroom was thrown into a state of intense excitement.

The girls screamed, the boys jumped up out of their seats, and crowded to the front.

"Three cheers for Jack Gentleman!" roared Fred Fielding.

"Hold your own, Jack! Don't let him bulldoze you!" shouted Will Barmore.

"We'll stand by you, Jack!" Caspar Arnold yelled.

But Jack just folded his arms and stood like a statue.

"Sit down, boys!" he called out. "If you have any regard for me sit down. I can fight my own battles. I don't want to make trouble in Baymore School!"

Before he had finished speaking Professor Smallman was on his feet again.

In his fall his head had come in violent contact with the edge of the platform, and as the blood was now streaming down his face he was anything but a pleasant object to contemplate, it must be confessed.

"You'll pay for this, young man!" he shouted. "Not satisfied with assaulting Prince Munton, you must assault me! Get your books and leave the building instantly! Do you hear?"

"I hear what you say, sir, and I suppose I must go," replied Jack, firmly; "but I want it distinctly understood that I did not strike you or Prince Munton either."

"He did!" broke in Prince. "I saw him hit you, Mr. Smallman. He not only hit me, but he jumped on me after I was down!"

"Liar! Liar!" cried a dozen voices. "'Tain't true!"

"Silence!" thundered the principal.

"Jack Rayburn," he added, "you are dismissed from Baymore Academy! There is the door! Go!"

"Very good, sir," replied Jack calmly; "I will go. Gentlemen do not lie. I am determined to be a gentleman even if I am turned out of school."

Then Jack walked quietly to his desk, took out his books, strapped them up and started for the door.

You could have heard a pin drop as he passed down the aisle.

But just before he reached the door, the silence was broken by a wild shout.

"Three cheers for Jack Gentleman! 'Rah for Jack Gentleman! 'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah!"

Tears came to the boy's eyes.

He turned and waved his hat, for he could not speak.

Then he opened the door and passed from the class-room.

It was all over now. The worst had come.

Jack Gentleman had been turned out of school.

Now, we have taken up so much space in telling what happened on this particular day, ever to be memorable in the annals of Baymore Academy, that we have neglected to speak particularly of the location of the academy itself.

This may be told in a few words.

Baymore is a small village on the north shore of Long Island Sound, just beyond the river which separates the State of Connecticut from New York.

Thus it will be seen that its location was not only extremely favorable for its development as an educational institution, being within easy reach of the great metropolis, but also a charming one for the pupils.

Back of Baymore the country is diversified by hills and valleys, and the rides and walks are delightful, while directly at the foot of the hill upon which the academy building stands lies Black Bass Bay, thickly studded with wooded islands.

Beyond Turtle Head the Sound proper begins.

No better place for boating in the known world, and be very sure the Baymore boys all knew it.

Not a few of them kept their own sailboats, and in addition there was the Blackbird, a pretty little pleasure steamer belonging to the school, in use almost daily for trips to the islands and out upon the Sound after recitations were over.

On this very afternoon an excursion to the old abandoned fort on Turtle Head had been planned in which all the scholars were to participate under the leadership of Captain Fred Fielding, who had recently been chosen master of the Blackbird.

Steam was up when Jack Gentleman walked rapidly down the hill, and he sighed as he looked at the trim craft and thought of the many pleasant hours he had spent on board—good times to come again no more now that he had been turned out of school.

Where to go Jack had never given a thought. Of course the boy was angry, insulted, and deeply grieved at the injustice with which he had been treated.

But Jack virtually had no home, otherwise he would have known just what to do.

He was an orphan. His guardian, an austere man, whom he seldom saw and knew next to nothing about—resided in New York City, Jack himself having been brought up in Boston, but in neither city was there any one to welcome him or any place which he could call home.

When Jack reached the foot of the hill his eyes shifted from the steamer to a trim little sailboat lying alongside the wharf.

It was the Foam. Her name was painted in black letters upon the white stern.

A pretty boat, as trim a craft as there was on Black Bass Bay; moreover, it was Jack's—the only present his guardian had ever bestowed upon him. It was more home to the boy than any house on the face of the earth.

No wonder then that he walked straight down the wharf with the intention of going on board.

"I'll take a run down the bay," he resolved. "I've got no place to go to, and may as well put in the night on the Foam as anywhere else; at least it will give me time to think and form my plans for the future, for, of course, I can never go back to school."

Just as he was about to step down off the wharf upon the deck of the Foam, a boy of about his own age appeared on the Blackbird.

"Hello, Jack Gentleman!" he called.

"Hello, Larry!" answered Jack.

"What's up, Jack? Is school out already?"

"I'm out, Larry."

"What do you mean?"

"Turned out!"

"Gee! No! I won't believe it!"

"It's a fact, Larry. I've been turned out of school."

"For what? What's old Smallman thinking about? You turned out of school, Jack? Why, then, half the boys will leave."

"Oh, it was because I wouldn't apologize to Prince Mutton for my part in what happened this morning. Probably you heard all about that affair."

"From the way I heard it, Prince is the one who ought to be turned out, Jack."

"That may be, but Smallman didn't see it so. We had trouble in the class-room, and he fell down and cut his head, and so—well, and so I was turned out of school."

"And has everybody else been turned out with you, Jack?" cried Larry, suddenly pointing up the hill. "Look! Look there! By gracious, they are all coming! What does this mean?"

It was certainly rather peculiar.

The boys and girls of Baymore Academy were pouring out through the big front door.

They were shouting and laughing, and calling to each other.

"Come on, boys! Come on, girls!" they could hear called out. "We won't go back to Baymore till Jack Gentleman is righted. We'll teach old Smallman a lesson——" and so on; there was more of it, but it need not be told.

"Thunder! This won't do!" cried Jack. "Baymore mustn't be turned upside down on my account!"

"I reckon you can't stop it," laughed Larry, "and whatever the fellows are in for I'm in for, too. Look! There's Smallman now!"

The principal of Baymore Academy had suddenly come out on the porch.

He was bareheaded and seemed to be greatly excited.

"Come back! Come back!" he called. "We'll talk the matter over—it can all be arranged!"

"No, it can't, Mr. Smallman!" shouted Fred Fielding, defiantly. "If you turn Jack Gentleman out, you turn the rest of us out. It's all your own doings. We are turned out of school!"

CHAPTER III.

JACK SHOWS HIMSELF A GENTLEMAN AGAIN.

"This won't do, boys. I can't have it. The school mustn't be broken up on my account. You go back and leave me to my fate."

Such was Jack Gentleman's manly appeal to his fellow pupils as they crowded around him on the wharf.

But it was entirely without effect.

"We won't listen to anything of the kind!" cried Nettie Harker. "We've voted on the question, Jack. It is too late to change it now."

"Decidedly!" added Laura Patterson. "We won't submit to such injustice. I tried to tell Mr. Smallman just what happened, and so did Celia Perry, but he wouldn't listen to either of us. He'll have to take you back before we go back, Jack Gentleman—that's sure."

"And so say we all of us," laughed Fred Fielding. "Fact is, Jack, we are going to have a vacation. After you left we resolved ourselves into a committee of the whole and demanded that Prince Muttonhead be expelled and you reinstated. Old Smallman wouldn't have it so, and we got up and dusted. We are going down to the old fort on the Blackbird, and we mean to spend one night there, at all events. Probably before morning Smallman will have come to his senses; if not, why, then we'll just keep the ball a-rolling, that's all."

Jack was overpowered. Still he didn't like the situation overmuch.

To be accused of breaking up Baymore Academy was a very serious matter. It might bring him into trouble with his guardian; besides, he did not like to feel the responsibility of such a thing.

"Of course, you fellows can do as you like," he said, "but I ain't going on the Blackbird. I intended to run down to Tur-

the Head on the Foam, anyhow, and I'm going to do it. If you choose to follow me it ain't my fault."

"Good enough!" cried Fred. "I understand what you are driving at. You don't want to be responsible for this. Well, you don't have to. Stick to the Foam, and we'll go on the Blackbird; we'll meet and talk matters over at the old fort."

"Where's Prince Munton?" asked Jack, dropping the argument.

"Oh, he stands by Smallman, of course, and so does Nat McMillan, Dave Wright and a few others. Let the old man keep up the Academy with such timber if he can—we ain't in it. Come, boys and girls, get aboard! Get aboard!"

There was a general rush for the Blackbird then, and all hands crowded on board with another rousing cheer for Jack, which must have sounded decidedly pleasant to Professor Smallman, who still stood on the steps of the Academy, watching all that was going on.

Jack stood for a moment on the wharf greatly perplexed.

Evidently his schoolmates were in dead earnest; there seemed to be no use in holding out against their wishes.

So at length he went on board the Foam, ran up his sail, and stood away from the wharf in the wake of the Blackbird, which was already steaming down the bay.

The last they saw of Professor Smallman he had put on his hat and was striding off toward the village.

Jack wondered why, and his curiosity was soon satisfied, for before they were half way to the fort he saw Constable Kelly's trim little steam launch, the Dora, put out from Baymore wharf.

The Foam was just close enough to the steamer now to be out of the way of her wheel, and Jack, pointing to the launch, called out to Fred Fielding to look.

"I see!" shouted Fred from the pilot-house. "It's the Dora, and Kelly's in it. Much good it will do old Smallman! Just as though any three men in Baymore were going to bring us back to school!"

"There are three on the Dora, and one is Smallman!" answered Jack. "But who's the other, Fred?"

"Give it up!" shouted Fred. "I can make out the professor and Kelly, but I can't tell who the third man is."

"They are heading this way!" called Will Barmore from the deck. "Of course they can't touch us, though."

"They'll overhaul us long before we get to the fort," answered Jack. "There ain't a swifter craft than the Dora on the Long Island Sound."

"That's what!" cried Fred, anxiously. "Say, Jack, you'd better let us give the Foam a tow and you come on board!"

"No," replied Jack, decidedly. "I ain't in this business. I haven't done anything wrong, and I don't propose to."

"Don't read us a moral lecture, Jack. What we are doing is all on your account."

"I ain't reading you any lecture. You are acting on your own responsibility, and I on mine. We'll go our own ways and not interfere with each other—that's what I mean."

"Do come on board for my sake, Jack," called Nettie Harker. "If anything should happen to you think how we'd all feel."

Now, it was very hard for Jack to refuse this appeal, for he thought a great deal of Nettie—a great deal more perhaps than she was aware of—but he was a boy who always stuck to his convictions, and he was feeling very determined just about that time.

We shall soon see that he found reason to regret his decision. The Dora came ahead like lightning, and before they had passed Fox Island she was within hailing distance.

Long before this the third man in the launch had been recognized as Dan Conover, one of the tough characters of the village, who sometimes assisted Constable Kelly in his work.

"Boys! Boys! Stop the steamer! I want to speak with you!" shouted Professor Smallman. "I've got something to propose."

A shout of defiance went up from the Blackbird.

"You can propose it to us down at the fort!" called Fred Fielding. "We don't stop the Blackbird now."

For a moment the professor and the constable appeared to consult together, and then the Dora suddenly changed her course and shot in between the steamer and Fox Island.

Jack saw the meaning of the maneuver could be nothing but to head him off, and separate him from the Blackbird.

He altered his course a little with the intention of shifting his position to the other side of the steamer, which there would have been no difficulty in doing if he had not suddenly perceived great rocks right ahead of him, a black, jagged ledge, covered with sea weed, projecting up out of the water at low tide, which happened to be the condition of things now.

This threw him back upon his former course, and as the Dora was forging straight ahead, it also threw him back on the launch.

Still Jack calculated that he would be able to slip past her, and he came within an ace of doing it, but Dan Conover, who was running the launch, was too quick for him.

In a twinkling he ran the nose of the Dora into the Foam, cutting a jagged hole in her side.

"Hold on there, Jack Rayburn!" shouted Kelly.

"Take him—take him! I charge him with assault and battery!" Professor Smallman shouted out.

They both tried to seize hold of Jack, but neither touched him, and the force of the collision threw the launch and the sailboat apart.

"After him! I'll give fifty dollars for the capture of that boy!" bawled Mr. Smallman, springing to his feet.

"Sit down! Do you want to capsize us!" roared the constable. "Do you want to go overboard, you fool?"

The warning came too late.

Just how it happened Jack never exactly knew, but all in a minute the professor was floundering in the bay.

He came up to the surface, sputtering and coughing.

"Save me, save me!" he cried. "I can't swim a stroke!"

But to have gone straight to the rescue would have been to drive the bow of the Dora head on to the rocks.

Dan Conover sheered off, probably with the intention of coming up to the drowning man in a moment.

But the professor mistook the intention.

"You cowards! Are you going off to leave me?" he shouted.

"Save me, Jack! Save me! I'm going down!"

So was the Foam—she was sinking rapidly.

Jack could not resist the appeal, however. Unjustly as Professor Smallman had treated him, he was too much of a gentleman to resist the appeal.

Without an instant's hesitation, Jack threw off his hat, coat and shoes, and plunging into the bay, swam with a bold, overhand stroke for his drowning enemy.

Not one boy in fifty would have done it.

But Jack was a gentleman.

The fact that the drowning man was his enemy made no sort of difference to him.

A dozen strokes brought him to the place where Professor Smallman had been.

He was not there now.

For the second time he had sunk; when he arose again Jack caught him by the collar.

"Don't turn on me! Don't grab me!" he cried. "If you want me to save you keep as you are."

The professor was past speaking; just then the Dora came up and Jack helped Constable Kelly to lift the professor into the launch.

He sank down upon the seat all in a heap.

"Arrest that boy, Kelly!" he gasped. "Don't let him escape!"

Here was gratitude! Surely this was a fine return for Jack's gentlemanly act.

But the professor might just as well have held his tongue, for Constable Kelly had already turned on Jack and seized him by the collar.

"Get into the launch, Jack Rayburn," he cried gruffly. "You are my prisoner! I arrest you in the name of the law!"

CHAPTER IV.

JACK ESCAPES TO THE BLACKBIRD.

Small by nature as well as by name! That's what was the matter with the principal of Baymore Academy.

If he had been a man of a little larger bore, so to speak, Professor Smallman need never have had this trouble at all.

He showed his smallness now by ordering Jack Rayburn's arrest a few seconds after the brave boy had saved his life.

There he sat in the boat shivering and chuckling, while Constable Kelly and Dan Conover pulled poor Jack on board the Dora.

Meanwhile the Foam, cut in two by the collision with the launch, had sunk out of sight.

Jack Gentleman's pretty boat was ruined and lost to the boy forever.

Poor Jack could have cried. He almost forgot the chagrin of his present disagreeable situation when he saw the boat go down.

"Now we've got you, you young scoundrel!" chuckled the professor. "You will commit assaults on your best friends, will you? You will break up my business and entice all my scholars from me! Ha, I will show you what sort of a man I am! I'll make you sup sorrow with a big spoon for this! I was going to write to your guardian and ask him to be a little lenient with you, but I shall do nothing of the sort now! I'm going to put you in jail and prosecute you to the full extent of the law!"

Now, this was a very undignified speech on the part of Professor Smallman, but it showed the mean vindictiveness of his nature, and seeing that the man was what he was, it is doubtful if he could have acted differently.

Jack eyed him defiantly. He could not very well help it. In spite of his good resolutions to keep cool and do the right thing no matter how much Mr. Smallman might do or say to provoke him, all the manhood in his nature—and he was possessed of a lot of it—rebelled against such injustice as this.

"You can do whatever you please," he retorted, but I'll give you to understand that what you say isn't true. I did not assault you, Mr. Smallman, and you know it. Furthermore, you know without my telling you, that I had no more to do with breaking up your school than the man in the moon."

"Don't lie about it, Jack Rayburn! It won't do you a bit of good."

"I'm not lying. I'm telling the exact truth, and you know it. There's one thing I'll tell you, though, if it will give you any satisfaction, and that is you've got to pay for the Foam!"

"Hear him!" cried the professor, turning purple with rage. "As though I had anything to do with the sinking of your rubbishing boat! Constable, you'll bear witness——"

"Hold on there, professor!" broke in Mr. Kelly, "seems to me you are going it rather strong. Don't ask me to bear witness in the boat matter. You know well enough that it was by your orders that we ran into the Foam, and you said you'd stand the damages, whatever they might be."

"What! What!" cried the professor.

But he stopped right there, and did not say any more, for he knew that what Constable Kelly said was true.

"Besides," added the constable, "I don't like this sort of business; I like to see a man act square. The boy saved your life. Before we could have got the Dora around you'd have been a goner. Why don't you show a little gratitude, and put him on board the Blackbird with his friends and begin the fight over again."

"Put him on board the Blackbird! Why, the proposition is absurd!" roared the professor. "Mr. Kelly, I'm amazed! I hold you to your bargain—I mean to your duty. Jack Rayburn must be lodged in Baymore jail."

"Oh, very well," returned the constable. "If you insist upon it, of course, there's nothing for me to do but to obey."

But this was very much of a half-hearted assent.

Jack was listening, and took it all in.

He felt that if a chance offered for his escape he had better take it, for he saw at once that Constable Kelly was not likely to display much activity toward getting him back on the boat.

Meanwhile the boys on the Blackbird had not been blind to all that had happened—not a bit of it!

Will Barmore and Caspar Arnold were with Fred Fielding in the pilot-house.

They were thinking of Jack, talking of Jack, ready to do anything for Jack that they could.

"But what's to be done?" said Will. "The old man has got Jack, and he'll make it hot for him, sure."

"He'll put him in jail, that's what he'll do," said Caspar. "Say, Fred, ain't there any way we can head him off?"

"Wait," replied Fred. "I'm thinking."

"What about?"

"About Jack, of course. Hold up, will you? What's Dan Conover trying to do now?"

"He's trying to bring the Dora around the Needles, so that he can run up the bay again," said Will; "that's what he's about."

Now, the "Needles" were two rocks which rose abruptly out of the water a little in advance of their present position.

When the accident occurred, Fred had given Larry the bell to stop the Blackbird, and as the Dora kept on going she had now got in a little ahead.

To take a launch around the Needles was undoubtedly the proper thing to do, if it was the constable's intention to return up the bay, for on his left were the shoals, which extended over to the shore.

Between the Needles and the shore was only a narrow channel, over which anyone could easily leap at low water, and this done it was entirely possible for a person to reach the shore by wading through the mud when the tide was out.

The tide was falling now, and Fred saw that he would have to make haste, or he would not be able to get the Blackbird past the Needles as it was.

All this the boy took in at one glance, and with it a plan occurred to him by which he might be able to turn the tables completely on Professor Smallman.

"Fred! Fred! Can't something be done to rescue Jack?" called Laura Patterson from the deck.

"Hold on! Don't say a word!" answered Fred. "Watch me, girls! If I don't do it now I never shall!"

As he spoke Fred gave the bell to go ahead at full speed, at the same time giving his wheel a twist so as to bring the prow of the Blackbird right across the path of the launch.

It was a bold move! If Fred was able to carry it out the Blackbird was bound to crowd the Dora against the Needles, unless Dan Conover was able to alter his course.

Now, Dan was not up to anything of the sort, and this was precisely what happened. Before the constable and his companions realized the situation it was too late.

On came the Blackbird, and there was nothing for the Dora

to do but to back or be crowded against the rocks by the swash of the steamer's wheel.

"Sheer off, there! What are you trying to do? Run us down?" roared the constable.

Perhaps Professor Smallman would have had his remark to make also, if he had not been too badly frightened to speak, but as it was he just sat there clinging to the sides of the boat, his face as white as a sheet.

"Promise to give up that boy, or we'll jam you on the Needles!" shouted Fred. "We'll give you a chance to wait for the tide!"

"Catch the line, Jack!" yelled Will Barmore, at the same instant.

Will, who was now on deck, had received his instructions from Fred, and knew just what he was doing.

Flinging a line over the side of the steamer, he so directed it that it landed directly in the boat.

Of course, this was only a flyer in more senses than one.

If the constable had chosen he could easily have prevented Jack from catching the rope.

But he did nothing of the sort.

Jack seized the line, and grasping it firmly, sprang to his feet and gave one leap out of the launch.

Will, Caspar, and Gus Penny held on tight, and the girls screamed with delight as Jack came up on deck hand over hand like a monkey.

"Stop him! Stop him!" bawled Professor Smallman.

But Constable Kelly and Dan Conover were not stopping just then.

They had more than they could do to save the Dora, for Fred gave his wheel a quick turn, and crowded the little launch against the Needles.

Her timbers were crushed in like paper.

When the Blackbird shot out into deep water Professor Smallman, the constable, and Dan Conover were crawling up on the rocks.

"Come back, boys! Come back! I give up the fight!" shouted Mr. Smallman. "Don't leave us here! Come back and take us on board the Blackbird and I'll do anything you say!"

Shouts of derision were the only answers to this appeal, and the Blackbird steamed on down the bay.

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT MISSION.

Now, far be it from us to justify such a proceeding as Fred Fielding had successfully undertaken, but boys will be boys, and almost all boys have a keener sense of justice than full-grown men.

Professor Smallman had been exceedingly unjust to Jack Rayburn; in fact, his injustice to all his pupils, except those who were the children of wealthy parents, had long been notorious and exceedingly galling to others beside Jack.

Thus it will be seen that this state of things had come about by degrees, so to speak, and it was not altogether on Jack's account that the pupils of Baymore Academy had broken away from school.

As soon as Jack's feet touched the deck, he was surrounded by his friends and warmly congratulated on his escape.

"I knew we could do it," called Fred Fielding from the pilot-house. "I told Will that you wouldn't let that rope pass you, and neither you did!"

There was a general shout then, and Will Barmore started the old school cry.

"Baymore, Baymore! Rah for Jack Rayburn! Rah, rah, rah!"

It must have been anything but pleasant for Professor Smallman, who heard it all.

"Do you think we ought to leave them there, Jack?" asked

Laura anxiously. "Do you think there's any danger? If the water should come up over the rocks they may be drowned."

Everybody laughed at this, for it was well known that the Needles were out of water at all stages of the tide.

"Not a bit of danger as far as that is concerned, Laura," said Jack. "The tide never covers the Needles; besides, it is running out now, and when it's low water there is nothing to hinder them from walking ashore."

"But the mud!" cried Nettie Harker.

"Oh, they won't be drowned in the mud; they may have to roll up their trousers, but they can do it—I have. Still, I'm perfectly willing to take them on board if the rest of you agree, although I suppose you know that Mr. Smallman ordered my arrest by the constable."

"What! After you had saved his life?" cried Will.

"It was done the instant they got me on the boat."

"Then that settles it!" cried Fred. "We don't go back a foot!"

It had been practically settled before this, and the steamer steadily held her course toward Turtle Head.

In less than twenty minutes they had made their landing at the old wharf, which runs out a hundred feet or more into the bay in front of the abandoned fort.

Jack and Will Barmore were first ashore, and made the lines fast.

Captain Fred stood on the deck as the boys and girls filed down the gang plank.

"Go straight up into the fort and take possession of the officers' quarters, girls?" he called out. "That's to be your house. We boys sleep in the barracks. It will be a jolly lark anyhow, for there's provisions enough on the Blackbird to last us a week."

This was not strictly in accordance with the facts, but the supply of provisions, such as it was, seemed certainly sufficient to last several days if economy was practiced.

There was plenty of bread and butter, and coffee and tea and canned goods of all kinds.

Part of these formed the regular stores of the steamer, for the Baymore boys always kept the pantry well supplied, and part had been laid in the day before for the pleasure trip then in prospect, all of which was very fortunate, for it was all likely to come right in play now.

Busy moments followed the landing.

The old house which had once been the officers' quarters was opened—there was no trouble, for the door was not locked—and the girls took possession of the two main rooms on the ground floor where there was still some furniture remaining, quite enough to make a short stay comfortable with the aid of the cushions from the cabin of the Blackbird, and the mattresses and bedding from the six little staterooms.

The boys worked like beavers to make everything comfortable, and all the girls declared that they had succeeded in doing so.

As for themselves, the bunks in the barracks were quite good enough.

It was now nearly six o'clock and everybody was beginning to think about supper.

Jack had gathered plenty of dry wood and started a fire in the stove in the officers' kitchen, and Celia Perry, constituting herself head cook, was now at work making coffee and warming up the canned meats and vegetables.

When supper was at last announced all hands gathered round the long table in the officers' mess room, and there never was such a jolly meal known in the entire history of Baymore Academy.

After it was over Nettie Harker got out her mandolin and began to play, and then they sang and told stories, and some strolled out to walk on the old casemates in the moonlight.

At nine o'clock the girls turned everybody out, and by half-past nine the boys were asleep in the barracks.

All but the guard. There were three boys on the Blackbird, and three stationed on the casemates. It had been decided that they should watch until midnight, when they were to be relieved by others.

This was by Jack Rayburn's orders, for after supper an election had been held, and Jack was unanimously elected captain, after which he acknowledged the honor bestowed upon him by declaring that he would accept the office and hold it just as long as he was obeyed implicitly and not one moment longer, which made everybody laugh, for Jack was anything but a tyrant, and they all knew it perfectly well.

Now, neither Jack Gentleman, Fred, nor Will Barmore were among those who stood guard, which may seem a little odd, but there was a good reason for the captain and his two lieutenants taking first sleep.

Jack had other plans, and shortly after midnight he woke up Fred and Will, and all three walked down upon the wharf.

"Who goes there?" called Caspar Arnold, suddenly appearing on the deck of the Blackbird.

"Barmore!" replied Jack.

"The word is correct! Is that you, Jack Gentleman?"

"Tain't anyone else, Caspar. How's everything on board the Blackbird?"

"All serene. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Can't I go, too?"

"Well, I don't mind; but I think some one of our special crowd ought to stay here and look out for the girls."

"I think so, too," said Fred. "You know as well as I do, Caspar, that the little fellows wouldn't be in it in case anything occurred."

"That's right," said Caspar. "I'll have to stay; but do be careful, boys, and don't get into any scrape."

Jack only laughed at this, and all three went on board the Blackbird.

The boys opened the door of the engine-room, and Jack shouted:

"Hey, Larry! Are you there?"

"You bet! All ready, Jack!" came the answer from the regions below.

"We're all ready. Fred's going to take the wheel now."

"Very good, Jack!"

"Is your fire all right, Larry?" called Fred.

"Never better. We can run up the bay flying."

"Let her go, then! You'll get the bell in just about two shakes. Stand by the lines, you fellows on the wharf! Make ready to cast off!"

Fred hurried to the pilot-house then, and Jack and Will took their places on deck.

The lines were cast, and Jack and Will pulled them in as Fred gave Larry the bell.

Then the Blackbird swung around, and started up the bay at full speed.

"Where are we off to, Jack Gentleman?" asked Will, for as yet he had simply obeyed orders, without knowing at all what was in the wind.

"Off on a secret cruise," laughed Jack, "and the lieutenant must never question the captain. You'll know in due time."

But Will was not satisfied with this, and was about to question Jack further, when all at once Fred gave a shout.

"Look over there, boys!" he cried. "Look over there, will you! What's that light?"

A bright tongue of flame shot up in the western sky as the boys turned and followed the direction of Fred's pointing finger.

"By gracious!" cried Jack. "It's a house on fire, and, what's more, it's right in the direction of the school."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURGLAR AT BAYMORE.

For a few moments the boys watched the fire in silence.

"It certainly must be the school," said Jack at last.

"I'm not so sure of it," replied Will. "In my opinion it's the old barn."

"Now, I wouldn't wonder if it was," said Fred. "It seems to me to be more in that direction."

The old barn was situated about a quarter of a mile back of Baymore Academy. It stood near the site of an ancient farmhouse, which had long ago fallen into ruins; it was a place where the boys often went on rainy days, and many an hour's fun they had enjoyed there.

"If it is the barn it must have been set on fire," declared Will, "for there ain't any way in which it could possibly catch of itself."

"I guess it's the barn fast enough," said Fred. "See, it seems to be dying down already. Now, then, Captain Jack Gentleman, perhaps you'll tell us the meaning of this secret cruise."

"When a crew sail under sealed orders they are generally told where they are bound after they get out to sea," answered Jack, with one of his merry laughs, "so I'll tell you what my scheme is now, and why I asked you to be ready to take me out in the steamer to-night."

"I wish you would," said Will. "I for one am dying with curiosity to know."

"What do we need most in our present condition?"

"More grub!"

"We'll get it to-morrow. I'll arrange that. Next?"

"Our wheels," called Fred.

"Attend to yours and don't look this way! You've hit it. We're going after our wheels."

"Bully!" cried Fred. "But can we get them?"

"We must, even if we have to break into the long shed. We can't have a bit of fun without our wheels."

This, then, was the meaning of the Blackbird's midnight cruise. The run up the bay was made in surprisingly short time.

As they passed the Needles the boys were on the lookout for Professor Smallman and the constable, of course, but saw nothing of them.

The tide was pretty well up again by this time, and they could only conclude that the prisoners on the rocks had taken advantage of the ebb to walk ashore.

When the Blackbird neared Baymore Fred turned her aside, and instead of landing at the academy wharf he ran the steamer in under the bluff, a little further down, where she was made fast to a tree.

"Now for the wheels, boys," said Jack; "if we don't get them I'll never dare to show myself at the fort, for Nettie has set her heart upon having hers."

"There's the schoolhouse, all right," said Fred, when they came out on top of the bluff, "so it must have been the old barn after all."

"Strange that no one seems to be stirring," said Jack. "I should have thought they would all have been up to see the fire."

It certainly was strange, although Fred and Will did not seem to give any particular weight to Jack's remark.

The big Academy building was all dark as the boys passed through the gate and went around to the long shed where the bicycles were kept.

As this was practically detached from the main building, being only connected with it by a door at the further end,

they did not anticipate much trouble in getting out the wheels; the only danger was that they might be seen rolling them through the yard, for, of course, they would have to make several trips in order to get them all down upon the bluff.

Yet they had no trouble at all, and to their surprise they found the door of the wheel-shed unfastened.

Without stopping to speculate on this very unusual occurrence, they ran the wheels out two and two, and finally had all but their own safe on board the Blackbird.

They now returned and took those out, and Will was just closing the door when he suddenly whispered:

"Say, boys, where's Prince Muttonhead's wheel?"

"Where is it, sure enough!" replied Fred.

"Tain't here," said Jack. "He must have taken himself off!"

"Or taken the wheel inside," said Will. "But never mind; let's light out."

"Wait!" said Jack. "Boys, I ain't through yet. I've got to go to my room."

"To your room! How in the world do you expect to get there?" breathed Fred.

"I think I can climb up by the lightning rod. Anyhow, I've got to do it. Remember, I don't expect to come back here again. I want my clothes and some other things belonging to me. You know I've been turned out of school."

"That be blowed! We've all been turned out of school. Let them go, Jack," said Fred. "Even if you can get up by the lightning rod, you'll be running a fearful risk."

"No, I can do it. Come on! All you fellows have got to do is to watch outside."

The boys reluctantly consented, and leaving their wheels against the shed, they stole around behind the Academy, for the dormitory in which Jack Gentleman was accustomed to sleep was located on the second story in the rear.

"By gracious, there's a ladder there right under your window now," breathed Will.

"Hush!" whispered Jack, catching hold of Will, and drawing him back around the corner of the building. "Look there."

A boy had suddenly come out from under the porch, pausing at the foot of the ladder.

This in itself was startling enough at such an hour, but what made it more so was the fact that he had a black silk handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face, and his hat pulled down over his eyes, completely disguising his features.

He gave one stealthy look about him, and then ran up the ladder, raised the window of Jack's dormitory, climbed in, and disappeared.

"What in the world does that mean?" gasped Fred. "That's shady business, sure!"

"It means burglary, that's what!" breathed Jack.

"As true as you live," said Will. "What's to be done?"

For a moment the boys stood looking at each other blankly.

"Suppose we ring old Smallman's door bell and let him know?" suggested Fred.

"And be accused of the robbery," replied Jack. "No, thank you. I've had enough of that man's sense of justice. Still, I hope I'm too much of a gentleman to stand by and see him robbed, even if he has wronged me. Come, I'm going to tackle this thing myself."

"Don't you do it," said Will.

"You can't stop me, fellows! Come on or not, just as you please."

Jack was off like a flash, and went up the ladder quicker than the supposed burglar had done.

"You stay here and watch, Will. I'll go with him," said Fred, making for the ladder.

He was in the dormitory in an instant, but Jack was not there.

The door leading into the hall stood wide open, and Fred groped his way through.

He could now hear Jack stealing downstairs, and he started to follow, when all at once there was a sharp cry and the sound of a heavy fall.

"Jack! Jack!" called Fred, no longer able to contain himself.

The only answer was a muffled yell for help, and the sound of a struggle in the lower hall.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT THE CASH BOX.

Fred Fielding was terribly frightened as he went dashing down the stairs to the lower landing.

Before he could reach it he heard quick footsteps running through the hall.

"Jack! Jack!" he called, pushing on through the darkness.

Then all at once he stumbled over somebody, lying stretched upon the floor.

It was Jack!

Fred's fright now became positive terror, as he stooped down and raised Jack Gentleman in his arms.

"It's all right, Fred. It's all right, old man!" gasped Jack.

"After him! He's been breaking open old Smallman's safe! Catch him if you can!"

"I can't leave you, Jack! I won't!"

"But you must! Here, I'm all right! Let me go with you!"

Jack scrambled to his feet, and, clinging to Fred's arm, they ran on through the dark hall.

"He came in behind and jumped on me!" he gasped, as they ran. "He got me by the throat and nearly choked me, Fred."

"Who is he?"

"Give it up."

"Perhaps he's got a revolver—we'd better take care."

"If he has he didn't shoot—no, I don't think he's got any revolver; but here we are at the end of the hall. Where the deuce is the fellow now?"

A sudden crash of glass in the big dining-room, which opened off this hall on the left, brought the answer.

The burglar, whoever he might be, was evidently forcing his way through the window.

It spoke well for the courage of these two boys that they rushed right into the room.

But it was too late.

The burglar had already broken through the window.

Finding the sash fastened down, he had not stopped to raise it, but just bolted right through.

The window was a wreck, and the masked boy was gone.

Fred unfastened what remained of the lower sash, threw it up, and looked out.

"That fellow was as badly frightened as I was," he exclaimed. "Come on, if you can, Jack, or stay here. I'll follow anyhow—here goes!"

He sprang through the window, almost tumbling into the arms of Will Barmore, who now came running around the corner of the house to find out what the row was all about.

Fred tried to explain as they ran, and followed by Jack they made for the road.

But there was no one to be seen, look in whichever direction they would, and the boys soon gave up all idea of finding the fellow. They now returned to the broken window, and stood there for a moment talking the situation over in low tones, and altogether uncertain what to do.

"Strange there is no one stirring," said Jack. "There's been noise enough made to wake the seven sleepers. I can't understand it at all."

"Old Smallman can't be home, or he'd have been up sure," said Fred. "He was always a light sleeper, you know."

"I'm inclined to think he hasn't been home since we left him in the Needles," replied Jack. "If he was it wouldn't be very healthy for us to meet him now. Still, we ought to go in and see how much damage the burglar has done."

"We'd better wake up Mr. Riggs or old Joe Watson," said Jack. "We ought not to go in there without a witness. Next thing we know Smallman will be charging us with the burglary."

Now, old Joe Watson was the school janitor and man-of-all-work, and might have done well enough for a witness, but Fred did not see the necessity of any such course.

"Pshaw—nonsense! Come ahead and let's look for ourselves!" he exclaimed. "I'd like to see old Smallman accuse you of the robbery, Jack!"

They then lighted the hall lamp and went with it into the library, where Jack declared he had seen the burglar go.

Professor Smallman kept his safe here. It was an antiquated affair, and so insecure that the principal of Baymore Academy had repeatedly threatened to buy a new one, declaring that anyone could open it with a good cold chisel.

As they entered the room the boys saw that it was open now, and its contents lay scattered about the floor.

"By gracious! the fellow has done it for fair!" exclaimed Jack. "He's taken the cash-box sure."

"Not much!" cried Fred, suddenly pouncing down and picking up something off the floor. "Here it is!"

It was certainly the professor's cash box which Fred had picked up. The boys had all seen it many times, and they recognized it at once. It was still unopened, and there was no appearance that anyone had tried to open it.

"This must be turned over to Professor Smallman or somebody else, that's sure!" declared Jack.

Neither Fred nor Will disputed this, but it proved to be something easier said than done.

After some discussion the boys went to Professor Smallman's private door, and boldly pulled the bell, but received no answer after they had pulled it half a dozen times.

Then they went upstairs to the room occupied by the under master, Mr. Riggs, finding it, to their surprise, open, but dark and deserted.

It was so with the rooms of each of the other teachers, both on the boys' side of the house and the girls'.

Every room was vacant, and when they went to the servants' quarters it was the same way.

"What can it all mean?" exclaimed Jack, when they found themselves down in the lower hall again. "It looks as though we had the Academy to ourselves."

"In my opinion it means that everybody has quit," declared Fred. "Come, fellows, let's get back to the Blackbird and take the cash box with us. We can give it to Professor Smallman first time we see him. Of course, we can't leave it here."

It was so decided, and the boys went out through the broken window, and mounting their wheels, rode down to the bluff.

All was as still as death about the Academy when they left it. It was a positive relief to hear Larry Latham's voice greeting them on the deck of the Blackbird when they came out on top of the bluff.

"Where are the wheels, Larry?" cried Jack, looking round, and seeing that they were no longer where they had been left.

"Oh, I took them on board!" replied Larry. "Might as well be working as doing nothing. What in the world kept you so long?"

"Burglars!" replied Fred.

"Burglars! Gee! What's been burgled? Where were they at?"

"Up at the Academy. Old Smallman's safe was broken into."

"Good! Serves him right, the mean old hunk! Hope to goodness they got all his cash."

"Oh, don't say that, Larry. I don't wish the professor any harm."

"Pshaw, Jack! You are too much of a gentleman sometimes. If Smallman had done me the dirty turn he did you I'd wish him every harm that could come to him."

"Then you'd be as mean as he is," retorted Fred. "I'd rather be a gentleman like Jack than be that."

"Anyhow, they didn't get the cash, for we've got it," said Jack. "But we won't talk any more about it now, Larry. We are coming aboard with the wheels, and we'll get back to the fort as soon as we can."

Now, it was not easy work getting the wheels down over the steep bluff.

Larry Latham showed the boys the path he had chosen, and Fred and Will started down with theirs.

Jack Gentleman was about to follow them, but finding the cash box in his way, he laid it down behind a big rock, intending to come back and get it, which he did within five minutes.

"Hurry up, Jack! Don't keep us waiting!" cried Fred, who was already at the wheel.

"Be with you in two shakes!" called Jack, as he ran up the bank. "Anyhow, there's got to be somebody ashore to cast off."

In a moment Jack came running out to the edge of the bluff in great excitement.

"Boys! Boys!" he yelled, "it's gone! The cash box is gone!"

CHAPTER VIII.

PRINCE "MUTTONHEAD" DOES THE RIGHT THING.

"Gone! It can't be! Who could have taken it?" cried Fred Fielding, amazed at Jack Gentleman's startling announcement.

But the cash box was really gone, in spite of Fred's positive statement. It was no longer behind the stone where Jack had placed it, and though all hands came ashore and brought lanterns and searched everywhere, there was no trace to be discovered, either of the missing cash box or the thief.

Jack was terribly disturbed, for he felt certain that sooner or later the loss of the box was bound to reflect upon himself.

But this did no good either, and in the end they were obliged to give it up and start the Blackbird down the bay.

They were scarcely well under way, when to the utter surprise of Jack and Will, who were talking together on the deck, who should walk out of the cabin but Prince Munton.

"How are you, Jack?" he said, with a sulky bravado in his tones. "How are you, Will?"

"Thunderation! Whatever brought you here?" cried Will.

"Oh, I came aboard," replied Prince. "I saw you fellows fooling round the wheel shed, and I followed you down to the bluff. When you went back after more wheels, I just sneaked aboard, and here I've been ever since."

"The deuce you did! Well, it's just like you—you never were anything else but a sneak, Prince Munton. What do you want here, anyhow?"

"Want to join you—that's what. I ain't going to stay in that old roost all alone. Every teacher in the school has left, and even all the servants have quit. I don't want to be the off ox. I'm willing to join you fellows and take my chances with the rest of you, so—well, that's why I came aboard."

"We don't want him and we won't have him at any price!" shouted Fred from the pilot-house. "I'll run ashore and we'll fire him, boys!"

"No," said Jack. "Keep right on, Fred. Prince has got to give an account of himself. Maybe he knows something about the box."

It was Jack's first thought the instant he laid eyes on his enemy, but he had to give it up.

He took Prince in hand and at once questioned him with a sharpness that would have roused the ire of the bumptious Prince at any other time, although he was meek enough in his replies now.

Nothing came of it. Prince denied all knowledge of the burglar or the box. He declared that he had heard the boys when they first came to the wheel-shed, being awake at the time.

He said further that he had slipped on his clothes and followed them down to the bluff on their second trip, coming out of the dormitory wing by the side door.

As to all that had happened afterward, he professed the most profound ignorance, and he wound up with a pitiful whine to be allowed to join his schoolfellows at the old fort.

"I was dead wrong, Jack," he said, "and I told Smallman so, but he wouldn't believe me. I begged him to take you back into the school, but he's dead set against you because you left him on the Needles, and he had to walk ashore through the mud when the tide went out. As to all that about the burglary and the cash box, I don't know no more about it than the dead."

There was a good deal of talk besides that which we have recorded, but it was done while the Blackbird kept on down the bay.

Jack determined to yield to Prince Munton's entreaties.

"We'll let him come with us," he said to Fred, when he went up into the pilot-house to talk it over. "Anyhow, he's one of us, and we can't very well refuse him, and I have an idea that he may be a good fellow to have round when the row about the box begins, as it's sure to sooner or later, for he did see us searching for it, and he can bear witness that we haven't got it now."

"Pshaw!" cried Fred. "I wouldn't trust him as far as I could sling a bull by the tail. If we take him he'll get back on us sure. But you're boss, Jack, and I shan't say no. I believe he's nothing but a spy, and that he was set to watch the wheels, because we were sure to come for them. Did you ask him where Smallman is now?"

"Yes, I did, Fred."

"What did he say?"

"That the professor came back all plastered over with mud and very cross—that he had a row with Mr. Riggs, and all hands left. After that, he declares, the professor went down to Baymore, and he hasn't seen him since, and doesn't know what he intends to do."

"It's a trick!" declared Fred, "and I shall stick to what I say till it's proved that I'm right, which I don't believe will be very long; but you are boss, Jack, and if you decide to let him stay—why, let him stay!"

Certainly it could not have been a very pleasant thing for Prince Munton to be on board the Blackbird, for after they got through questioning the fellow, Jack and Will avoided him, and left him to his own reflections.

After a few ineffectual attempts to make himself agreeable, Prince walked astern, and stood there looking off on the bay.

A little later he tried it again, and tried to chime in with the boys, but it was no use. They tried to be half-way pleasant to the fellow, but it wouldn't work; so Prince went astern again, and sat there alone until the Blackbird rounded up at the fort wharf.

"Who goes there?" shouted Caspar Arnold, running down the grassy slope to the wharf.

"Baymore!" cried Fred.

"Baymore's all right! What luck, boys?"

"We've got the wheels!" called Jack, "and we've got great news to tell!"

"Tell it, then," replied Caspar, catching the line which Will flung to him and making fast.

"Every teacher has quit the school, and the servants have gone into the bargain."

"Gee! What's that for?"

"Row with Smallman on my account, I suppose," laughed Jack. "I seem to be making a lot of trouble these days. Is everything secure, Caspar?"

"Everything; everybody's asleep except the guard."

"Then we'll leave them so till morning, and turn in here on board the Blackbird. Better come aboard yourself, Caspar. You've been up all night, and must be pretty well tired out."

Caspar accepted the invitation, and was duly surprised at seeing Prince Munton.

"I wouldn't have taken him if I'd been you," he declared. "However, I suppose you know your business, Jack, and it's none of mine to interfere."

"Oh, he can't do us any harm," laughed Jack. "Don't look so glum, Prince; turn in down in the cabin now, and in the morning you shall go up to the fort and find your old friends glad to see you, no doubt."

"I'm going to do the right thing anyhow," replied Prince. "I'm tired of having everybody down on me, I want you to understand that."

Now, just what Mr. Prince Munton considered the right thing it is hard to say.

Certainly it was not sleeping, for he never closed his eyes, and when daylight came he got up off the sofa upon which he had been lying, and sneaked up on deck.

It was a clear, still morning, and the bay was as smooth as glass.

Up in the pilot-house sat Dave Wright, presumably on watch, but actually sound asleep.

Nat McMillan was pacing the deck. These two boys had come on board after the arrival of the Blackbird to take their turn on the watch.

"Hello, Prince!" exclaimed Nat. "How in thunder did you come here?"

"Didn't you know I was coming? Didn't I tell you that you'd see me here?" replied Prince, with an ugly smile. "You know me well enough, Nat, to know that I never get left."

"Blest if I think you ever do," replied Nat; "but say, Prince, none of your tricks, I hardly thought you'd dare to try it, and I'm blest if I want to see you do it now, for we are all having a jolly good time here."

"What do you mean, Nat? Are you going back on me after all I've done for you?" demanded Prince, fiercely. "You know very well that I could make it hot for you if I chose."

"Hush!" whispered Nat, turning pale. "Don't speak so loud. Dave may hear. Say, Prince, it would be a blame shame to spoil this lark so soon. Wait till a little later, can't you?"

"Won't do it! Do you suppose I'll let Jack Gentleman lord it over me? Oh, I guess not! Besides, I've given my promise to Smallman, and once I've promised I always do the right thing."

Thus saying Prince walked to the stern of the Blackbird and gazed searchingly over toward the point.

"What are you looking at?" demanded Nat, coming up behind him.

Instead of answering, Prince took out his pocket handkerchief and waved it three or four times.

Instantly a man stood up beside the big birch tree on the point.

He also took out a handkerchief and waved it.

"Confound you! You're bound to spoil our fun!" snapped Nat. "What's that mean?"

"None of your business," growled Prince. "I'm bound to call down Jack Gentleman—that's what I'm bound to do."

"Now, probably it was this that Mr. Prince 'Muttonhead' called 'doing the right thing.'"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTACK ON THE BLACKBIRD.

No one but Nat McMillan saw Prince Munton's treacherous trick, but as it happened, Jack Gentleman awoke within three minutes after Prince gave the signal.

Jack was sleeping in one of the little state-rooms, lying on the bare slats of the berth, with his coat doubled under him for a pillow, for the bedding had all been taken up to the officer's quarters for the use of the girls.

Jack looked out of the little window, and saw that it was daylight.

He immediately got up, and never suspecting the treachery of his old-time enemy, proceeded to wash his face and hands, and to comb his hair.

"I must notify Mr. Smallman about that affair," he thought. "I am determined to do it. Shall I do it direct, or shall I take a spin down to Baymore on my wheel and tell Sheriff Cardman all about it? He's a square man, and—Heavens! What's this?"

Just then Jack happened to glance out of the window, and saw, to his amazement, half a dozen rowboats, all well filled with men, coming down toward the Blackbird from the direction of the point.

It was so clear that Jack had not the least difficulty in recognizing Professor Smallman in the first boat.

Sheriff Cardman, the very man he had been thinking about, was with him, and so was Dan Conover and Constable Kelly.

The other boats were filled with Baymore men, some of whom Jack recognized and some he didn't.

"They are after the Blackbird," flashed upon him. "They are after the Blackbird sure."

He dashed into the next stateroom and woke up Fred and Will.

In a moment all three were on deck, but none of them remembered Prince Munton until now.

They looked around for the boy, but he was nowhere to be seen.

Nat McMillan had also disappeared, but Dave Wright was calmly slumbering at his post in the pilot-house.

"Somebody has given us away, fellows!" cried Jack. "Run, Will! Run to the fort! Call up Larry, Fred! We've got to make a fight for it. There mustn't a single man of them get aboard the Blackbird, nor on the wharf to cut her loose!"

Will jumped ashore and ran for his life.

While Fred ran to wake up Larry, Jack dashed into the pilot house, and roughly rousing the sleeping guard, blew the Blackbird's whistle again and again.

This had the desired effect, and the boys up at the barracks, aroused by the noise, came hurrying out before Will reached the casemates.

"Come down here, every one of you," shouted Jack. "The enemy is going to try to board us! They must be driven off."

There was a general stampede, and the boys came rushing down the hill.

"Wake up there, you lazy snoozer!" cried Jack, giving Dave another shake. "You're a pretty fellow to stand guard! Don't you see what's happened while you've been sleeping on your post?"

"Don't stop to talk to him, Jack," said Fred, from the deck where he had appeared with Larry Latham. "We want to save our wheels anyhow, even if they do capture the boat! I say, let's run 'em off!"

"Nothing of the sort! They ain't going to capture the Blackbird, not if I know it! Our golf sticks are below, boys; let's get 'em up! They are just the things we want."

The golf sticks were in the cabin, and there were more than fifty of them. Jack and his friends had them up before the boys reached the wharf.

"Make ready to repel boarders!" shouted Jack, as they came running down. "Half of you stay where you are, and give it to 'em with staves. Fred, you take the wheel. Larry, get to your engine now! Caspar, you look out for the hurricane deck, and keep your crowd near you. Pelt 'em with anything! Throw the water buckets at them, if you can't find anything else. Will and I will take the main gangway with our crowd, and lay for 'em there!"

By this time the boats had approached within fifty feet of the steamer.

"Boys!" cried Professor Smallman. "Boys, I want to talk to you! I've got a proposition to make!"

"Keep off!" shouted Jack. "Don't you come any nearer—it will be the worse for you if you do!"

"Do you still defy me?" cried Smallman. "You are making a big mistake. Give up Jack Rayburn and all will be forgiven!"

The answer was a chorus of derisive shouts and a shower of missiles, stones from the wharf, water buckets and other things from the hurricane deck.

But this seemed to have no effect, for the boats came steadily on.

In a moment the sheriff's boat was abreast the main gangway.

"Keep off!" called Jack. "Keep away from here!"

"Surrender!" cried the sheriff. "You have stolen this steamer! I charge you with piracy! Surrender in the name of the law!"

"We'll do nothing of the sort!" shouted Jack.

Then he and Will and several others bent down through the opening at the gangway, and the sheriff and Professor Smallman got it over their heads with the long golf sticks, and their hats were knocked over their eyes.

CHAPTER X.

THE LOSS OF THE BLACKBIRD.

"Look out, boys! Be careful! Don't hit too hard! We don't want to hurt anybody, you know."

Really, Jack Rayburn was too much of a gentleman to be the leader of such a mob of wild young colts as were now trying to defend the Blackbird from the sheriff's attack; his order did little good.

The boys were in the thick of the fight, and belabored the sheriff's party with their golf sticks so vigorously that they were soon driven back to the boats.

They pulled out into the bay a hundred yards or so, and rested on their oars.

"You keep away from here now, and leave us alone, and we will leave you alone!" shouted Fred Fielding from the upper deck.

There was no answer from any one in the boats.

It was useless for the boys to shout out taunting remarks and crack jokes at Professor Smallman's discomfiture as they did, for no one in the boats said a word.

For the first few minutes Jack Gentleman enjoyed the triumph with the rest, but all at once it dawned upon him that this ominous silence was slightly suspicious.

"Fred!" he exclaimed, "how many boats were there when we first saw them?"

"Blest if I remember!" replied Fred. "Why do you ask?"

"Are they all there? Hasn't one or more of them worked around on the other side of the wharf while the fight was on?"

Such an idea had never entered anyone's head; all hands were on the side of the Blackbird toward the water and could not have seen.

Just as Jack spoke the boats suddenly began to move toward the steamer once more.

"Look out, boys! They are going to try it again!" shouted

Will Barmore. "Stand ready! Give 'em another dose when they start to come aboard!"

On came the boats, the rowers pulling vigorously. As they neared the wharf two of them suddenly separated from the rest, and headed round the end of the wharf.

This confirmed Jack's suspicions that some trick was in the wind.

The wharf was sufficiently high to enable a boat to be pulled under it.

It at once occurred to Jack that an attempt was about to be made to board the Blackbird from the wharf, which was now deserted, the boys who had been left to guard it having come aboard.

"Guard the wharf, fellows!" Jack shouted, and then he started across the deck.

It was too late! The mischief was already done.

Suddenly there was a rush from the forward part of the boat—he could hear the tramping of feet, and a dozen or more men came running toward the main gangway around which Jack and his friends were gathered, the rest of the boys being on the hurricane deck above.

"Surrender there, you young scamps!" bawled Dan Conover, who led the boarders. "Surrender, or we'll make it hot for you!"

"Betrayed!" gasped Fred Fielding. "By jove, it's just as I expected! This is Prince Muttonhead's treacherous work!"

It was exactly that.

Prince Munton and Nat McMillan were with the boarders. They had opened the forward gangway, and let down a rope by aid of which Dan Conover's party, which had sneaked in under the wharf, were able to come aboard.

This was Prince Munton's little game, and it worked to a charm.

The attack was sudden and vigorous. Dan Conover's party were all armed with stout sticks, and they drove the boys before them like sheep.

It was of no use for Jack to try to rally them, for rally they would not, but instead of that they flocked upstairs and joined their companions on the upper deck.

This gave the sheriff just the chance he wanted. The boats were up alongside the steamer again by this time, and Professor Smallman's crowd came aboard partly by the main gangway and partly by the forward one, for the two boats which had separated from the rest came under the wharf.

The lower deck of the Blackbird was now in full possession of the boarding party, but the Baymore boys still held the deck above.

Up the companionway the sheriff's men came flocking.

"Drive 'em back, boys! Don't let 'em down us!" cried Jack, planting himself bravely at the head of the stairs.

It was no use! The sheriff's men came with such a rush that they were swept off their feet.

"Look out! They've got revolvers!" Gus Penny yelled.

This was true enough, but it is not at all likely that the revolvers were loaded, or that the sheriff's men would have used them if they had been.

But the cry had its effect on the boys just the same, and they jumped down upon the wharf and ran as fast as their legs could carry them toward the fort.

Jack and Fred had to go with the rest, for there was no such thing as staying the panic now.

"Get inside the fort and we'll shut the iron gate on them!" he shouted. "Go it, boys! Go it! They mustn't capture one of us, even if we have lost the boat!"

It was nip and tuck, though.

There were some good runners among the sheriff's party, and they lost no time in jumping down upon the wharf.

"Stop, boys, stop! Surrender now!" shouted Professor

Smallman. "All I ask you is to give up Jack Rayburn, and I'll forgive the past."

A chorus of derisive yells followed this announcement.

It is doubtful if Professor Smallman paid much attention to them, for all at once he caught his foot on a stone and fell headlong. Constable Kelly was right behind, and of course had to fall over him. Two more tumbled over the constable before they could stop themselves, and while they were tumbling about and trying to recover their footing, the last of the Baymore boys had passed the gateway which opened through the high mound of earth forming the wall of the fort.

"Shut the gate!" shouted Jack. "Shut it, quick."

Now, the gate was a heavy iron affair, really a door set in solid stone.

Slam-bang it went, cutting off the further advance of the sheriff's party, for Jack hastily put up the heavy iron bar which secured it.

"We are safe now for the moment!" gasped Jack. "Let them get through if they can. Even if we have lost the Blackbird we must hold the fort!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE ENEMY IS DRIVEN OFF.

"Safe for the moment!" cried Jack, "but we've got to hustle or they'll have us yet."

The girls came flocking down from the officers' quarters while Jack was speaking.

Of course, they wanted to know all about it, and the questions came so thick and fast that Jack did not even attempt to reply, and it was scarcely necessary, for all the other boys did, and everybody fell to talking at once.

"Time!" cried Jack. "They'll be up the bank in a moment; we want to head them off!"

"Not so easy!" exclaimed Fred. "The walls are a good twenty feet high, and I'd like to see them scale them without a ladder; you know as well as I do that they are almost perpendicular. I tell you it can't be done."

Jack was not so sure, so they all climbed up on the casemates to see how matters stood.

"Lay low, boys! Don't let them see us," ordered Jack. "And above all, don't make any noise."

So they climbed up on the casemates, and lying flat, crawled out to the edge of the embankment, leaned over and looked down.

The sheriff's party had retreated and were mostly on the wharf, but Professor Smallman, Dan Conover, Mr. Cardman, Prince Munton and a few others were standing outside the iron gate talking in low tones.

"They ain't going to try it," whispered Jack to Fred Fielding, who was close beside him.

"Don't be too sure," replied Fred. "They are plotting some mischief, you can bet."

"They can never scale the walls, though. You were quite right about it, Fred."

"Hush! Not so loud! Of course they can't get over the walls; we could hold out here for a month as far as that is concerned."

"Let's hunt them away."

"How can it be done?"

"I'll show you. Stay where you are, Fred."

Jack edged away, and getting further back on the wall where he could not be seen, whispered to several of the boys to crawl out to the edge and join Fred and Will Barmore.

Then he went down into the fort and called out:

"Pass up those cannon balls, boys! Form a line on the bank there! Pass 'em along!"

On the inside of the wall the bank was sloping, and it was an easy matter for the boys to range themselves in line.

There were great piles of cannon balls at each casemate. Some few of the guns carried shot too heavy to be easily lifted, but the majority of the balls could be handled well enough.

Following Jack's directions, the boys passed them from hand to hand until at least fifty were on top of the wall. Jack then crawled over alongside of Fred again, and looked down.

"Are they still at it?" he whispered.

"Still talking," replied Fred. "I wish I could hear what they are saying, but I can't."

"What do you make out of it, anyhow?"

"Can't make it out at all. They are getting ready to pull out on the Blackbird, though. That's one thing sure."

"Let's hurry them up. There's no use in them hanging about here any longer."

"You wouldn't hurt the old man, Jack? One of those shots dropped on his head would wind up Baymore school forever."

"No, no! Of course I wouldn't do that! Well drop 'em on their toes. Now, then, let 'em go!"

Then the fun began.

The heavy iron balls went flying down from the wall.

The move was a complete success. Professor Smallman got a big one on his foot, and jumped back with a startled cry.

The boys sprang up after the first round, and kept on throwing the shots down.

"Quit that, you young scoundrels!" shouted the sheriff. "Do you want to kill us?"

"Get out of this!" shouted Fred.

"Take your old steamer and leave us alone!" cried Will.

Jack said nothing, and in fact it was hardly necessary, for the schoolmaster and the sheriff took to their heels and ran out of range of the shots.

But Prince Munton got one against his legs.

Fred threw it, and it must have hurt, for it took Prince's feet from under him, and away he went rolling down the hill, which was pretty steep between the entrance to the fort and the wharf.

In his efforts to recover himself, Prince rolled off the bank, tumbling into the water.

The last the boys saw of him he was climbing up by the wharf, dripping from head to foot.

Everybody was on top of the wall by this time, even the girls coming up to see what was going on.

"This ought to end it, Jack Gentleman," said Laura Patterson. "I think they will let us alone after this."

"If they don't we'll give them another dose," said Jack. "But I hardly think we are through with them yet."

"I see they've got steam up," said Celia Perry. "It looks to me as if they were going to start."

"I kept steam up all night," said Larry Latham, "so that argues nothing, but I think they do mean to start, though. They are all going aboard."

Larry proved to be entirely right, for within five minutes the Blackbird pulled away from the wharf and started up the bay.

The boys on the wall set up a rousing cheer as they departed, waving their hats, and the girls their handkerchiefs.

It must have been anything but pleasant for Professor Smallwood.

"I'll bet he wishes he hadn't turned you out of school, Jack Gentleman," said Fred.

"I'll make him wish he had left the Blackbird alone," said Jack, decidedly. "I'm not going to let this matter rest so."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Fred.

"Wait and see," replied Jack. "I'm thinking I'll let you know when I've settled on a plan. Meanwhile let's have breakfast. I for one am almost starved."

"It's been ready this half hour," said Laura Patterson. "Come into the mess-room, boys; we'll put it on the table."

That no such breakfast had ever been served at Baymore Academy, the boys were unanimous in declaring, and they demolished everything in sight.

"What's to be done now?" asked Laura Patterson, after the meal was finished. "We've got the day before us, and as we've lost our wheels we can't stir a step away from here, unless we walk or take boats that are stored in the long shed."

"We might go fishing," suggested Fred. "There's a lot of lines and hooks out there in the shed."

"Just the thing," cried Nettie Harker. "It will give us something for dinner, and as I'm chief cook I shall know how to appreciate that."

"You can all go but Fred," said Jack. "You know I'm captain, and my orders are that Fred stay here with me."

There was a great outcry against this decision, but Jack was firm.

So they threw open the big iron door, and the boats were dragged down the narrow neck of land which separated the fort from the remainder of Turtle Head.

The day was perfect, and the water as smooth as glass.

If it was not exactly the kind of day for fishing, yet fish were still so plentiful in Black Bass Bay as to make a good catch almost a certainty.

Jack and Fred stood on the wharf and watched the boats as they pulled away.

CHAPTER XII.

JACK GIVES THE SHERIFF A SURPRISE.

"What in the world is Jack Gentleman up to now?" exclaimed Will Barmore, taking a fine black bass off his hook.

They had all been watching Jack and Fred instead of paying the attention they should to their fishing.

For the last fifteen minutes these two boys had been digging on the narrow neck of land which ran down from the fort to the wharf.

Now they were walking slowly along toward one of the casemates, bending over the ground.

But there was no explanation of these mysterious proceedings to be had from Jack, when toward noon the fishing party came ashore well loaded down with the proceeds of their morning's sport.

Jack only laughed, and refused to explain anything, while Fred maintained an air of owl's wisdom, which was all the more provoking since nobody could tell what it was about.

"Fish chowder! That's what we want!" laughed Jack, when they plied him with questions about the two mysterious holes which had been dug on either side of the bank. "Make a big pot of it, girls, and we'll help to get away with it. If the sheriff comes back you may find out what those holes mean."

Sure enough, just as they were ready to sit down to dinner, which was not ready until almost three o'clock, Gus Penny, who had been down on the wharf, came running into the fort with the news that the Blackbird was coming up the bay at full speed.

"And there's a lot of men on board of her," he added. "I tell you what it is, boys, there's going to be a hot time now!"

Jack was on his feet in an instant. The girls looked rather alarmed.

"Do you really think there'll be serious trouble, Jack?" asked Laura anxiously. "I'm beginning to think that perhaps after all we'd better give in, and not keep up this fight."

"I'll do just as you say," replied Jack. "If you want me to give in why——"

"No, no!" they shouted. "We'll fight it out to the end! Do just as you like, Jack! We'll leave it all to you!"

The decision was so entirely unanimous that Jack could do nothing else than to drop all thought of giving up the fight.

"First of all, we want to pull the boats up out of the water,

and get them inside the fort!" he exclaimed. "If my plan works out as I expect, we shall need them more than ever, and anyhow there's no sense in allowing them to be captured by the enemy, as they certainly will be if we leave them where they are."

There were plenty of volunteers for the job, and the boys hurried down to the shore and dragged the boats up inside the fort.

They had scarcely completed the work, when the Blackbird came steaming up to the wharf.

Jack gave orders to close the gate, and all hands went up on top of the wall to inspect the new arrivals.

"It's the same old crowd that was here this morning," said Will Barmore.

"I see Prince Muttonhead!" cried Gus Penny. "By George, I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself, to think that I ever toadied to that little snob the way I did."

"I see old Smallman," said Caspar Arnold. "But say, boys, do you catch onto the ladders? They've got a dozen of them there on deck. I don't want anybody to tell me what their scheme is."

"They are going to scale the wall, that's what," declared Fred. "Jack Gentleman said what they'd do, and it has turned out just as he thought."

"I was sure of it," said Jack, quietly. "But let me tell you all one thing. They'll never get the chance to put their ladders against the wall."

"I'll bet they won't," laughed Fred.

"There's more of your mystery," said Will Barmore. "Why don't you come out flat-footed and say what your plan is?"

"Wait and see," said Jack. "But I tell you one thing, boys, and you, too, girls—if you want to change captains, I'm agreeable. We'll hold a new election right here and now."

Then there was another howl.

"If you say that again I shall move that we choose one of the girls captain," cried Laura Patterson. "Go ahead, Jack, and do just as you please. I speak for all the girls when I say that we want to leave everything in your hands."

"I'll fix it so that they can't come near the fort. I promise you that," said Jack.

"Then you'll have to do it pretty quick," said Will Barmore, "for they are going to land now."

This was a fact which needed no announcement, for the sheriff's men were already jumping off the steamer onto the wharf.

Then they passed down the ladders and threw off a good many ropes.

It was easy to guess now what they had gone back to Baymore for.

They had returned fully prepared to scale the walls of the old fort.

"Everybody go down!" cried Jack.

"What's that for?" demanded Will.

"Order to be obeyed!" shouted Jack, as he started down inside the fort. "Now, then, Fred, we'll make our island. Girls, if you hear a little Fourth of July business don't you be frightened. It can't do us any harm."

Larry Latham was the last to leave the wall, and before he started Sheriff Cardman, followed by fully twenty men, with Prince Munton, Nat McMillan and Professor Smallman, were coming up the wharf.

Jack hurried to the third casemate from the door on the right, and Fred went to the same one on the left.

"Ready!" cried Jack, as all stood eagerly watching.

Then he and Fred crawled into the casemates and disappeared.

"What in the world are they up to?" exclaimed Nettie Hark-

er, but as nobody knew, nobody attempted to answer, and after a minute Jack and Fred came crawling out again.

"Hold your ears, girls!" shouted Fred.

"Goodness me, Jack Gentleman! Are you going to blow up the fort?" Celia Perry asked.

"No; only the powder magazine on the neck!" answered Jack. "I'm going to make this an island. Let them get us then, if they can."

"Heavens! Suppose you kill somebody?" cried Will Barmore.

"We won't! We touched off the fuses—the magazine is under the neck—it will explode before they can possibly reach it."

The words were scarcely spoken when the explosion came.

A column of dirt and stones shot up high above the wall, and the ground shook beneath their feet.

"On to the wall!" cried Jack. "Come up and see our island. Let them get us now if they can."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHERE ARE JACK AND FRED?

Once on top of the wall of the old fort, the Baymore boys and girls were pretty well surprised at the sight which met their gaze.

The neck of land had disappeared and a channel some twenty feet wide now separated the fort from the main land and the wharf, through which the water was rushing like a mill race.

On the other side of the break Professor Smallman's party had gathered, seemingly as much astonished as were the Baymores on the wall.

"Phew! There's going to be a big row with somebody for this!" cried Will Barmore. "Jack Gentleman, you oughtn't to have done it. This is government property. Someone will get pulled in for this."

Strictly speaking, Will was right, and we do not attempt to justify our hero further than to remark that he never anticipated that the damage would be so great.

"Can't help it, boys!" he exclaimed. "What's done is done. There was more powder in the old magazine than I thought for, but anyhow we've gained our island. Now let them get across and attack us if they can."

"Look here, you young rascals!" shouted Sheriff Cardman. "Do you know what you've done? You've destroyed government property! You are liable to go to State prison for twenty years!"

"Let the government guard its property, then!" cried Jack. "Don't you fellows try to cross over here—we'll give you a warm reception if you do."

Now, in spite of this warning, the sheriff's party did make the attempt—nothing else was to be expected, for Mr. Cardman was not at all the man to give up or acknowledge himself beaten until the last gasp.

After some bandying of words back and forth the enemy retreated to the Blackbird, and in a short time the boys saw a small boat put out from the steamer and pull around into the new channel.

There were four men in the boat, the sheriff, the constable, Dan Conover and one other.

The remainder of the party collected at the break, bringing up the ladders and ropes from the steamer.

"This won't do," cried Jack, for of course the boys were watching these maneuvers from the wall. "Get down, boys. We must drive them off before they have a chance to begin."

Jack's method of driving the enemy was simple enough, and one which would naturally suggest itself to any boy.

Inside the fort there were plenty of stones, and while the

boys set to work gathering them up, Jack and Fred threw open the iron door and sallied out upon the bank.

"You can't come in here!" Jack shouted to the men in the boat.

"Who says we can't?" roared the sheriff. "You won't stop us, my bumptious young friend!"

"You've had your warning, Mr. Cardman; now take the consequences, if you persist in coming on!" cried Jack.

The consequences was a shower of stones.

The boys collected on the bank, and while some began pelting the crowd on the other side, others ran down to the end of the break and sent such a shower at the approaching boat as to send the sheriff back in disgust.

"It's no use, professor! We can't do it so!" they heard him call out. "Let's get back to the steamer. I ain't going to take the risk of a broken head for you or anyone else."

"Beaten off, by gracious!" cried Caspar Arnold. "Give 'em a cheer, boys!"

The air fairly rang with their shouts as the boat took the back track.

Professor Smallman and his party had already returned to the wharf, where they were at a safe distance from the stones.

"Dinner!" cried Jack. "Four of you fellows stand guard here. While the enemy holds its council of war we must eat."

The guard was selected and placed under the command of Will Barmore, the rest of the boys making a break for the dining-room.

Here Laura and Nettie had everything ready, and soon the knives and forks were rattling on the tin plates which had been found in the storeroom, and were made to do duty now for the first time in many years.

Before dinner was half over Will came running in with great news.

"They are putting off the bikes on the wharf and getting ready to start!" he called out through the door.

"What! What!" cried Jack.

"Just as I tell you! They are unloading the wheels on the wharf!"

"Looks as though they were going to give it up and leave us to ourselves. Come, fellows, we must see!"

They all ran out of the fort, and were just in time to see the Blackbird make the start.

Not at any time since the Baymores took possession of the old fort had there been such a round of cheers as went up now.

The boys threw up their hats, and the girls waved their handkerchiefs.

Professor Smallman and Prince Munton stood at the stern, gloomily watching the merry crowd as the Blackbird steamed away.

"Hey, Prince Muttonhead! When are you coming back again?" roared Fred Fielding, making a speaking trumpet out of his hands.

"The day after never!" shouted Prince. "We've done with you fellows. Stay here till you get tired—we shan't interfere with you again!"

"Smallman told him to say that! See how the old man is grinning!" cried Fred. "It's some trick."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack, decidedly. "Let's finish our dinner, boys. Say, Will, are you sure everyone went aboard before the Blackbird pulled out?"

"Sure as I can be," replied Will. "We were watching all the time."

"But I don't understand this sudden change of front."

"No more do I."

"There are our wheels, though. Shan't we go and get 'em?"

"Not yet. Keep a sharp watch. It's my belief that they are left there just for a bait, and I won't stir a foot until I'm sure."

Dinner over, the boys came out on the bank again, and relieved the guard.

No one had been seen near the wharf, yet it was impossible to see under it, and Jack knew well enough that a hundred men could be hiding beneath the planks, for the wharf ran quite a distance over on to the shore.

"We won't touch the wheels at present," he declared. "Let 'em stay there and we'll stay here; if Smallman has set a trap for us, we'll tire the watchers out."

So for the rest of the afternoon Jack kept his party inside the fort or on the bank.

Of course they had plenty to do. Jack was not the kind to let his little command stay idle.

"We'll have our regular afternoon drill, boys," he declared. "Just before dark we'll take one of the boats and go round the wharf. If we are being watched, and I believe we are, we won't give them the satisfaction of going for our wheels now."

Perhaps this was foolish—some thought so—but Jack was boss, and nobody disputed his will.

Now, Baymore had its military company like most boarding schools, and when Fred, who was the captain, called out "Fall in!" the boys formed in a line, using their golf sticks instead of guns.

They drilled for an hour, and then all joined in a football game, the girls sitting upon the wall watching them, and strolling up and down until it was time to get supper ready. After supper Jack announced that he would pull around the wharf alone and see if the coast was clear.

"You shan't do it," said Fred. "Someone's got to go with you."

"'Tain't necessary," replied Jack. "I can take care of myself, I guess."

"I'll go anyhow. 'Tain't a bit of use for you to say no. I'm determined."

There was no turning Fred from his purpose, so Jack yielded. A boat was dragged down to the shore, and the two boys entered it and pulled away.

All hands watched them from the bank in the fading light.

When they came abreast the wharf Jack looked back and shouted: "It's all right, boys! There's no one here!"

Then the boat passed under the wharf out of sight.

This was all in order, for the tide was out, and there were steps under the wharf leading up upon it. It was the only way to get on the wharf now without climbing the slippery spiles, and everybody knew that it was Jack's intention to use the steps. But the moments passed, and the boys did not appear on the wharf, nor did the boat come out again.

"Jack! Jack! Hello! Where are you?" Will Barmore began shouting at last.

There was no answer. Again and again Will shouted, and others joined him, but the same silence reigned.

"More treachery!" cried Will at last. "Jack and Fred have been caught as sure as fate!"

And indeed it began to look so.

It was quite dark now. Fully twenty minutes had elapsed since the boys went in under the wharf, and still they did not appear.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISONERS AT BAYMORE.

It took Will Barmore and the Baymore boys but little time to get two of the boats down from the fort and to launch them, once they had made up their minds to act.

In a few moments they were under the wharf, and the mystery of the disappearance of Jack Gentleman and Fred Fielding was in part explained.

"By thunder, what fools we've all been!" cried Will. "Nobody ever thought of the iron door!"

It was not the iron door up at the fort which called forth this remark, but another built on exactly the same plan set in the bank under the wharf.

The boys all knew that it was there, but as there were several such doors connected with the fort they had thought nothing of it. Once on a previous visit Will himself had tried to open it, but finding it locked, gave up the attempt.

Now that he saw the door again under the present circumstances, it instantly dawned upon him that the sheriff was probably better informed about it than himself, for there was Jack's boat drawn up on the shore under the wharf.

"What about the iron door?" questioned Caspar Arnold, in answer to Will's exclamation. "It's fastened, anyhow, ain't it? It only leads into some old magazine."

"We'll precious soon find out whether it's locked or not," cried Will, leaping ashore.

He had the door open before the boys could follow him, and it took some little courage, too, for he fully expected to see some of the sheriff's men come flying out.

Nothing of the kind occurred.

Behind the door all was dark and silent. After a moment Will struck a match and saw that instead of merely opening into some old magazine the iron door concealed a bricked-up passage leading in under the hill.

"This explains it!" he cried. "Jack and Fred have been caught and taken through here. Boys, we want a lantern. We must find out where this passage leads to, if it takes a leg!"

It took at least ten minutes to get the lantern, for of course one of the botas had to be pulled back to the fort.

When it came Will led the way into the passage, and followed by his companions passed through under the hill, coming out by a similar door on the other side of Turtle Head a distance of perhaps five hundred feet.

The mystery was all explained now. Steaming up the bay just visible in the fading light was the Blackbird.

Of course they could not doubt that Jack and Fred were prisoners on board the steamer, which, as they now saw plainly enough, had not retreated further than the other side of Turtle Head, where, owing to the hill, she would have been entirely out of sight of the fort.

And they were right in this. Jack and Fred were then in the cabin of the Blackbird, having been captured in precisely the way Will imagined, and hurried on board the steamer, which had been waiting all the afternoon behind the Head.

Thus far no one had come near them, and no one did come until just as the Blackbird was nearing the Academy wharf, when the door opened and in walked Professor Smallman, smooth-shaven and sleek as usual, with a black frown on his face.

He locked the door behind him, and seating himself at the cabin table, rapped upon it with his knuckles just as he might have rapped with his ruler upon the desk in the big recitation room at Baymore.

"Well, boys, so you see I've got you in my power at last," he said, sneeringly. "You'll find before I get through with this business that I'm no such fool as you thought for. Ahem!"

Now, whenever he was excited, Professor Smallman always wound up his remarks by clearing his throat, so Jack, who was as cool as a cucumber, knew that he must be excited now.

"We are certainly here, Mr. Smallman," he answered, quietly. "But I'd like to know by what right you take me prisoner? You turned me out of school, and I went—that's all."

"All! All!" cried the principal, raising his voice to a wheezy shout. "Ahem! I—ahem! I guess you'll find that it ain't all! Not a bit of it! I've been robbed, Jack Rayburn, and you're the thief! You and Fred Fielding. You two were in my library last night! You broke open my safe and stole my cash box! Ahem! Is that nothing? Ahem! I tell you I ought to

send you to jail, but I am merciful! I know that boys will be boys, and in spite of all that has happened, I can't believe that you really intended to deprive me of my money. Give it back, or at least tell me what you have done with it, and I will forgive you, and content myself with simply expelling you from the school. Ahem!"

"It's false!" cried Jack. "It's false, and you know it! Mr. Smallman, let me explain!"

"Stop! I want no explanations!" roared the professor. "Were you or were you not in Baymore Academy last night?"

"We certainly were, but——"

"Stop! Did you or did you not take my cash box out of the building?"

"Well, we certainly did, but——"

"Stop! You have admitted your guilt. That's enough. I will give you the night to think it over in; if you decide to restore the money that will end the matter; if not you go to jail, and I shall certainly appear against you and make it my business to see that you are punished to the full extent of the law."

"In the name of common sense and justice will you let me speak?" cried poor Jack, now worked up to a terrible pitch of excitement.

"No, I won't," roared the professor. "I don't want any talk. I want the money," and out of the cabin he went, slamming the door behind him, leaving the boys in a state of mind which was not at all improved when the evening's adventure came to an end, and each found himself locked in his own room in Baymore Academy, with one of the sheriff's men pacing up and down before the doors.

CHAPTER XV.

NAT M'MILLAN PLAYS A MEAN TRICK.

From eight o'clock, the time when the door of his room closed upon him, until midnight, Jack had about as uncomfortable a time of it as he had ever experienced in his life.

Not that he feared for the future as far as anything that Professor Smallman could prove against him went, but he knew that his guardian would show him no mercy, but, on the contrary, would surely believe any charge made against him. Then there was Fred to consider. What would his father say?

Jack paced the floor for an hour and then flung himself upon the bed and tried to sleep.

No use! In a little while he was on his feet again, walking up and down, up and down, until it seemed to him that he would go mad.

"I can't stay here, and I won't!" he resolved at last. "Someone has got to listen to my story. I believe if I could only get out and have a private talk with Sheriff Cardman at his house, that he would stand by me. I've always heard that he was a fair man."

For perhaps the twentieth time Jack opened the window and looked out.

He was high up from the ground—too high to drop, and there was no possible chance of climbing down.

Jack listened. For some time the footsteps of the sentinel had been growing more and more uncertain, and several times he seemed to stumble and fall against the partition. Jack had come to the conclusion an hour ago that the man was drinking; now as he listened he could not hear him at all.

He leaned far out of the window and softly called:

"Fred—Fred!"

Immediately there was a movement in the adjoining room, and the window was thrown up.

"Hello, Jack Gentleman! Is that you?" called Fred in a suppressed voice, looking out.

"Well, it is. Say, Fred, has that fellow gone to sleep?"

"Guess he has. I know he's full by the way he's been doing his beat, but I haven't heard him for a good ten minutes now."

"Just my idea! Fred, this is tough!"

"You bet it is!"

"Ain't there some way of getting out?"

"Can't think of any, Jack! If there was any bedclothes on this bed I'd have let myself down long ago."

"You bet I would, but I'm in the same fix. Can't drop, either."

"Too far. I don't want a broken leg—no more do you."

"Not much! I—hush! Someone coming around the corner of the house!"

"By gracious; it's Nat Mac, sure as you live!"

"Say, you fellows up there! Keep dark!" called Nat McMillan, pausing under the window and now plainly visible in the moonlight. "I want you to understand that I'm blame sorry for my part in this business. When it comes to making you out burglars I can't stand it no longer. I'm out! I'll help you if I can."

Jack caught his breath just in time to prevent himself from giving Nat a blast which would have been anything but pleasant for him to hear.

"Can you do it?" he called; "if you can, Nat, I'll never say a word against you from this time on."

"Why, of course I can do it," called Nat. "That's what I'm here for."

"Sure Prince Muttonhead didn't send you—you're his chum and always was."

"Honor bright, he didn't, Jack. Say, I'm done with Prince forever. He's as mean as they make 'em, but I'll tell you more about it when you come down. Can you catch?"

Nat held up a ball around which cord was wound.

"Let her come!" replied Jack.

Nat flung up the ball and Jack caught it.

"Pull up!" called Nat, and he began pulling on the cord himself, for it had unwound as the ball went up.

Fred, from his window, watched all this with intense eagerness, and his excitement increased when he saw Nat dragging a stout rope around the corner of the house.

"By gracious, we are all right now," he said, half aloud.

"Hush, hush!" breathed Nat. "Where's the sheriff's man?"

"Asleep, I guess," replied Jack, pulling up the rope which was attached to the cord.

"Good enough! You can come down on that, Jack Gentleman?"

"Of course I can. I'm ten thousand times obliged to you, Nat."

"Don't mention it. Come on, quick! There's plenty of rope. I can cut it and send the balance up to Fred after you are down."

Jack had the end of the rope in his hands by this time, and he made it fast to the bed-post.

It was an easy matter then to throw his legs out of the window, holding onto the rope, and Fred saw him slide down hand-over-hand.

"That's the talk," said Nat. "You'll let me go back to the fort with you, Jack?"

"Of course I've no objection if you act square."

"Honor bright, I will. Have you got a knife?"

"Yes."

"Mine's no good. Cut the rope and we'll tie it onto the cord."

Jack pulled out his knife and reached up as high as he could to cut the rope.

Then all at once Fred, to his horror, saw Prince Munton spring out from around the corner of the house.

"Look out, Jack!" he cried.

Too late! Prince dealt Jack a fearful blow on the back of his head with a golf stick before he could turn, sending him down all in a heap.

"That's the talk!" breathed Nat. "Make as much noise as you like now, Fred Fielding. We've got what we want."

He shook his fist at Fred, and then he and Prince Munton seized Jack between them and dragged him around the corner of the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

CRAZY LUCY GIVES UP THE BOX.

"Stand on your feet! You can't get away from us if you try. Ha, ha, ha! Mr. Jack Gentleman! We've got you now." There was something inexpressibly brutal in Prince Munton's voice and manner.

Bad as Jack knew the boy to be, he had now to learn that he was even worse than he had supposed.

Down on the bluff where the boys had taken the wheels was where Jack came to his senses. He was lying on the grass with his hands tied behind him. Prince and Nat McMillan were with him, and as soon as they saw him open his eyes and begin staring about they seized him and lifted him up, Prince making the remark quoted above.

Jack caught his breath and leaned heavily against a tree.

"I wouldn't have believed this of you, Nat!" he gasped. "I trusted to your honor, and this is the result."

Nat laughed coarsely.

"Prince is my friend, not you," he replied. "I always stand by my friends, Jack Gentleman, but you needn't fret yourself. We won't be hard on you if you do as we say."

"That's the talk," said Prince. "There's no use in mincing matters. We are out for business, Jack. You may think I've captured you to have revenge on you, but I don't care a rap for that. What I want is old Smallman's cash box that you hid in these bushes. Tell us where it is, and we'll let you go free."

Jack's eyes opened wide. All in a minute a suspicion dawned upon him.

Was Prince Munton the masked burglar? He was the real thief!

It could not be, he thought, yet how else could Prince have known about the cash box?

Jack caught his breath and tried to think.

"Come, speak up!" cried Prince. "If you don't we are going to wallop the life out of you. You've got to give up the cash box, that's flat."

"I haven't got it! I don't know anything about it!" gasped Jack, "and if I did I would never tell you."

Prince made a jump for Jack, almost before he had finished his sentence, caught him by the throat, and pressed him back against the tree.

"Tie him up, Nat!" he said. "Be quick! We can't fool here all night. Next thing we know his escape will be discovered, and we shall have the sheriff's man down on top of us, which will spoil our game."

Poor Jack! In his weakened condition he could do nothing, and Nat had him tied to the tree in short order.

Prince now pulled a rawhide whip out from his trousers leg.

"This is for you, Jack Gentleman!" he cried. "Tell what you did with the cash box or I'll wallop you within an inch of your life! Great Scott! What's that?"

A cry rang out through the woods, followed by a wild laugh.

"For goodness sake!" gasped Nat.

"This way, boys! This way! Here they are! They've got him, but I'll spoil their fun! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Crazy Lucy!" gasped Nat, for the strange old woman who had been the cause of all the trouble at Baymore Academy suddenly sprang out from among the trees.

She came running toward them, waving her arms wildly.

"Don't harm my boy! Don't harm my boy!" she shrieked. "This way! This way! Here are the young villains who set the old barn on fire and robbed the schoolmaster! Here they are! Here they are!"

Her wild cries took all the fight out of Nat McMillan, and he started to run.

"Stand your ground, you coward!" cried Prince, making a rush at Crazy Lucy. "Do you suppose I'm going to be frightened away by this mad woman? Not much!"

He struck at her with the whip, but Lucy dodged him, and with a quick spring caught him by the throat, and shaking him till his teeth rattled, threw him down upon the ground, taking the whip from him, and laying it over his shoulders with a will.

Nat rushed to the rescue, but his courage came too late, for at the same instant a big crowd of boys came running up the bank, shouting:

"Baymore, Baymore, Baymore!"

Caspar Arnold was in the lead, and Will Barmore was right behind him.

Jack's troubles were all over now.

The boys from the fort had come to the rescue. In a moment Prince and Nat were prisoners and Jack was free.

"By jove, we were just in time!" cried Caspar. "Hold him, Larry! Don't let Prince get the best of you! That's right, tie his hands behind him! Say, Jack, are you much hurt? We came down the bay in the boats as soon as we got on to their dirty trick, but it was hard pulling against the tide, or we would have been here before. Quiet now, Lucy! Quiet! Yes, you did do it! We know that! Let Jack speak."

It seemed as though Caspar himself would never finish talking now that he had got started, and as all hands were talking at the same time, and Crazy Lucy was shouting: "I did it! I did it! I saved my boy! He's a gentleman, every inch of him," etc., it made confusion worse confounded, but Jack was able to make his voice heard at last, and to explain all that had occurred after he and Fred disappeared under the wharf.

"So that's old Smallman's game, is it?" said Will. "How does he dare to accuse you of the robbery? He knows better than that."

"There's the fellow who knows better," said Jack, pointing to Prince Munton. "It's my belief that he can tell all about the robbery if he chooses."

"It's a lie!" said Prince, sulkily.

"It's the truth," said Jack. "Where's Lucy? She's got something to say about this."

But the strange old creature had now disappeared. While the boys had been talking she had taken herself off.

They looked for her as best they could, shouted and called, but all to no purpose. Crazy Lucy had vanished as she appeared, no one knew where or how.

"Tell what you know, Prince Munton," said Jack. "I believe that you are the fellow I chased out of Mr. Smallman's library. You've got to tell!"

"It's a lie, and I won't tell nothing," scowled Prince.

"Then you will, Nat Mac!" said Jack. "Come now! The tables are turned clean over. You've got to tell!"

But Nat looked at Prince and was dumb.

"Make them run the gantlet, fellows!" cried Will. "We'll knock it out of them!"

"No, no!" said Jack. "We don't want any brutality; there's been enough of that to-night. Take 'em up to the fort, boys; we'll get the truth out of them somehow. But now we must go and rescue Fred."

It was hard work persuading the boys to yield, but Jack had his way at last.

Prince Munton and Nat were then taken down to the boats, which had been drawn up on the shore under the hill.

Jack stood guard while they were gone.

"Six of you fellows stay with them," he ordered. "The rest come back, and we'll have Fred Fielding out of Baymore or know the reason why."

He was alone in a moment, for the boys all crowded down the hill with the two prisoners.

They had scarcely departed when Jack sprang into the woods.

"Here I am," he whispered, as Crazy Lucy came out from behind a tree. "I saw you making signs to me to send them away. What do you want—what have you got to tell?"

The old woman chuckled.

"Sure an' I've got a lot to tell you," she whispered. "Oh you're a gentleman, if there ever was one! I took it, for I thought he'd get it. Didn't I see him set the barn on fire? It was an accident—they upset the lantern; the other wan was afraid and made him take the box back when he wanted to hide it under the straw. Did he do it? Mebbe he did. Any-way you got it and left it by the stone, more fool you. He'd had it in a minute if I hadn't taken it, for wasn't he snoopin' round ye all the time? Yes, he was, an' here it is—you can give it back to the schoolmaster or you can kape it yourself, an' I'll niver tell on ye—but it's yours to do what ye like with. Here it is, me boy."

And Crazy Lucy pulled the cash box out from under her shawl, placed it in Jack's hands, and glided away among the trees.

Jack, lost in amazement, called to her to come back. She turned and shook her hand at him, then disappearing in the gloom.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NIGHT VISIT TO BAYMORE.

Fred Fielding leaned far out of the window, and watched Jack as he was dragged away, with a sinking heart.

"I knew it," he muttered. "I knew Nat McMillan couldn't be trusted. But what did they do it for? They never would have gone to all that trouble just for the sake of revenge."

This was Fred's idea, and we know how nearly he hit the truth.

But Fred wasted no time in idly speculating upon Jack's fate.

As he saw at a glance that he could not help his friend, Fred set about helping himself.

The rope still hung down from the other window, for Jack had not cut it when Prince Munton struck him that tremendous blow, and Fred now began to think how he could reach it, for once he could get his hand on that rope he saw that his escape would be easy; but the trouble was to get it.

Fred could see no way.

He leaned as far out of the window as he dared, but was unable to reach it. Just then he heard the guard moving about unsteadily in the hall, and he waited a good ten minutes till all was quiet, and then tried it again.

It was no use. The rope was not to be reached. Then Fred suddenly hit upon another plan.

The bed in the room was a cheap fourposter. Fred thought if he could only wrench off one of the posts he might be able to get the rope with it and pull it within reach, and this was precisely what he did, but the doing of it took time.

Fully twenty minutes elapsed before he accomplished his purpose, but at last success crowned his efforts, and the rope was within his grasp.

Fred pulled out his pocket-knife, cut the rope, and drew it in through the window.

Quick as thought he made it fast to the door, and lowering himself out of the window, grasped the rope and slid to the ground.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed a voice behind him, as his feet touched the grass. "By gracious, you don't need anyone to help you, Fred Fielding! You are able to do for yourself."

"Great Scott! What's all this!" gasped Fred. "Everybody here!"

There was a big crowd of boys around him, and there was Jack in the lead.

"What on earth!" cried Fred. "Why, Jack! I thought——"

"No matter what you thought. Here we are!" said Jack, who did not seem to care a fig whether he made a noise or not. "I've got the professor's cash box, Fred, and I'm going to give it back. We'll see now whether he can make us out burglars or not."

The boys pressed around Fred, and Jack hastily told his story.

"We are going right up to the front door in a body," he wound up by saying. "We are going to ring the bell and wake Mr. Smallman up."

"Yes, and he shall beg Jack Gentleman's pardon on his knees, or we'll take him prisoner and run him up to the fort and hold him till he does it!" cried Caspar Arnold. "Blamed if I'd give up the cash box till he did it, if it was me, but Jack's determined to play the gentleman, come what will!"

"That's what I am," said Jack. "Come on, boys. Let's do it, and get it over and start back to the fort, for I'm worried about leaving the girls with such a small force to guard the place. Before we get there I'll bet you what you like I'll wring a confession out of either Prince Munton or Nat Mac; we'll all witness it, and take it down to Professor Smallman in a body just as we are doing now."

They were making noise enough now to wake Professor Smallman or anyone else who might happen to be asleep within the walls of Baymore Academy.

The fact was, Jack never felt more independent in his life than at the present moment.

To say that he didn't care whether school kept or not but half expresses it, for he had fully made up his mind that no matter what happened it was very unlikely that he would ever get back to Baymore as one of Professor Smallman's pupils.

"Come on, boys!" he cried. "We don't have to do any more for Fred, for he's done it all for himself—come on, and let's finish our job."

So the boys formed in line and marched two and two around the house, with Jack Gentleman in the lead carrying the stolen cash box.

Somebody started the old school cry as they reached the steps, and the midnight silence was broken by:

"Bay—Bay—Bay—Baymore! Baymore! Rah, rah, rah!"

This was the first intimation that Professor Smallman had of what was going on, for he was in bed and sleeping the sleep of the just when the cry reached his ears.

He started up and jumped out of bed, just in time to hear the big gong attached to the front door give a sonorous peal through the deserted hall.

"Hit him again, Jack," said Caspar Arnold. "Give it another pull! Let the old man understand that we mean business, and that he has got to come down in more senses than one."

Jack pulled the bell handle again, and once more the gong clanged out its discordant peal.

"There he comes!" cried Fred, as a light appeared in the professor's window. "Won't he be surprised to see us here when he thinks us safe under guard upstairs?"

Just then the window was thrown up, and the professor's head came out.

"What's wanted?" he called down. Then he clapped on his eye-glasses, adding:

"Great Scott! boys! Is it you?"

"We want to see you, Professor Smallman!" shouted Jack.

"We want you to come down and open the door!"

The professor caught his breath.

He could scarcely believe his eyes, or rather eye-glasses—for without the latter he could not see a thing.

"What does this mean?" he roared. "Jack Rayburn! How came you there?"

He might have said more, but just then the window, which was one of the old-fashioned sort operated without weights, slipped and came down upon the good man's shoulders, knocking off his eye-glasses and sending them spinning down upon the ground.

A perfect howl went up from the boys. It was no use for them to try to keep up their dignity—they could not do it.

"Come down! Come down!" they cried. "We've got your cash, Mr. Smallman. If it was only us you mightn't get it in a hurry, either, but Jack's a gentleman, and he's come to give it up."

"There! I knew he was the thief, and I'm glad he's come to his senses!" snarled the professor. "Hold him, boys! I'll come right down!"

He disengaged himself from the window-sash and disappeared inside.

If he had not shut the window he might have heard the storm of hisses plainer that went up outside.

"Make him apologize before you give up the cash box, Jack!" they cried. "If you don't do it, we will."

Professor Smallman heard this, and he set his teeth as he went downstairs.

"I can't fight them all," he muttered, "but I'll read Jack Rayburn a lesson. I'll show him who is master of Baymore."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY.

Now, we want to do full justice to Professor Smallman, and in order to do it we ought to say that he actually believed that Jack Rayburn had stolen his cash box.

He let down the chain and threw back the big door, drew himself up to his full height, and tried to look as dignified as possible.

"Boys! I am glad to see that you have come to your senses even at this late hour!" he said. "This is your school, the home to which your parents sent you, and night or day its doors are always open to you. Take the earnest advice of one who has your welfare at heart, come in and go to your beds, and we'll settle our differences in the morning. Jack Rayburn, I'll trouble you for my box."

"Don't you give it to him, Jack! Don't you give it to him till he apologizes!" the boys shouted.

But Jack was no more to be moved by this than he was by the professor's gruff and peremptory tones.

"Here is your box, Mr. Smallman," he said, extending it toward the professor. "I want you to understand that I didn't steal it, but I think I can put my hand on the thief."

"I know I can put my hand on you!" cried the professor, suddenly seizing Jack by the collar and dragging him through the door.

He pushed the boy against the wall with a force which almost stunned him, and, with his disengaged hand slammed the door and put up the chain.

The howl which went up outside then was tremendous.

The boys threw themselves against the door in a body and tried to beat it in.

"Let him out! Let him out!" they shouted. "We want Jack! Give us Jack Gentleman, or we'll pull the house down over your head!"

"That's the kind of riot you stir up in my school, you young thief!" cried the professor, tightening his grip on Jack's

throat as he wrenched the box away. "By gracious, I'll make you pay for this, you young pauper! This comes from taking such nobodies as you into my school! I'll jail you if it costs me my life!"

Now, Professor Smallman was no weakling; on the contrary he was a remarkably strong man.

He dragged Jack along the corridor and into the library. Throwing the box down on the table, he gave the boy a violent push which sent him reeling back against the wall.

"Stand there and don't you dare to raise a finger or utter a word till I give you permission!" he cried. "First I have to find out how much of my money you have stolen—then I'll deal with you as you deserve!"

Outside the Academy the Baymore boys were beating on the door furiously, shouting loud enough to wake the dead.

"I hope I'm too much of a gentleman to raise my hand against you, sir," said Jack, with all the coolness he could assume. "Whenever you get ready to listen to my story, I'm ready to tell it—then you'll understand!"

"Silence!" thundered the professor, but instead of setting the example himself he gave a roar of pain, for the library door came suddenly open, throwing him half across the room.

It was Mahony, the sheriff's man.

"Oh, beg pardon," he stammered. "I didn't know. What in the world is the matter? How did that boy come here?"

"Ask yourself and tell me!" roared the professor. "You're a pretty man to put on guard!"

"Faith, and I'll show you that I can attend to my business!" cried Mahoney. "D'ye know that there's a hundred boys outside, and they've got a big timber and are trying to break down your dure?"

He seized Jack as he spoke, and whirled him around.

"Come upstairs, you young villain!" he cried. "Sure an' you won't slip through my hands agin!"

Jack jerked himself away and gave the fellow a good one in the chest which just doubled him up.

His patience was exhausted.

He was almost inclined to regret now that he had played the part of a gentleman in this matter of the cash box—he heartily wished himself outside with his friends.

"Och, murther!" cried Mahony, falling against the professor, who fell against the table, which overturned and sent the cash box flying, and caused both men to measure their length on the floor.

Jack rushed for the door, against which thunderous blows were being dealt by the boys outside.

"Open the door!" they shouted. "We want Jack Gentleman, and mean to have him! Open the door!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCORCHERS START DOWN THE BAYMORE ROAD.

"Swing it again, boys! Now, then, let her go!"

Bang! went the heavy timber against the big front door of Baymore Academy.

A dozen boys had hold of the improvised battering ram, and as far as strength goes when boys are aroused and determined, they can do almost as much as men.

Again and again the timber was hurled against the door, and if this particular door at Baymore had been made as most doors are nowadays, it would never have stood it—never in the world.

But it did not yield. Ten minutes persistent hammering accomplished nothing more than to dent the wood and spoil the varnish. The big front door at Baymore was made of solid oak, and its lock and hinges were strong.

"No go, fellows!" cried Fred Fielding, dropping his hold on the timber in disgust. "We'll never get Jack Gentleman out that way; we must try some other plan."

"Let's get in by the dormitory window," said Fred. "We can get the ladder from the barn, and be inside the school in two shakes."

Some change of plan had to be adopted, that was evident, but it would have been strange if so many boys could have agreed. Some followed Fred and others Will, but all hands rushed around the house.

No sooner were they in sight of the back yard than they wished they had made a move before, for they saw Professor Smallman's surrey go dashing away from the barn. The principal was driving, and on the back seat was Jack Gentleman, with the man Mahony beside him.

Evidently Jack was a prisoner—they were taking him to Baymore jail!

Oh, what a howl went up then!

"Stop there! Stop!" they yelled. "You shan't take Jack away!"

They rushed after the surrey pell-mell, and some of the foremost ones actually overtook it.

The frightened horse reared and plunged as Professor Smallman struck at Fred and Will with the whip, when they tried to seize the bridle.

"Look out, boys! You can't help me!" cried Jack. "Some of you will get hurt! Break away!"

Jack's hands were tied behind him, and he was also tied to the surrey, or he might have done something more than talk.

As for Professor Smallman, it must be admitted that he fought to some purpose. Holding in the horse with one hand, he struck right and left with the other.

All at once the horse broke into a run, and away went the surrey down the road.

"We must head him off, fellows!" cried Fred. "He must not take Jack to jail! He shall not! We can stop it yet!"

"How in thunder are you going to do it?" demanded Will. "There's no horse to be had, and even if there was, we couldn't harness up and overtake them now."

"But we can go down to Baymore in the boats and get there almost as soon as he can. It's only a mile and a half to the village down the bay, but it's five by the road."

"That's the talk!" shouted Caspar Arnold. "To the boats, boys! To the boats! We've still got a fighting chance to save Jack Gentleman, and we don't want to let it slip!"

They started for the bluff, but before they had gone a dozen yards they heard a clanging of bicycle bells, and there was a flashing of many wheel lamps along the road.

"Why, it's a lot of girls on bikes!" cried Fred.

"Yes, and half a dozen fellows, too," echoed Caspar. "By gracious, boys, it's our crowd down from the fort!"

"This is our chance!" exclaimed Fred. "The girls have got to give up their wheels—we can get there now."

"Where's Jack? Where's Jack Gentleman? Have you got him with you?" the girls called out, as they came up and caught sight of Fred, who led the crowd.

"Jack's arrested! They've taken him to Baymore!" shouted Fred. "Girls, we want your wheels! We mean to have him if we turn the old jail upside down to get him out!"

"I knew it!" cried Laura Patterson. "I said that the wheels would be needed. Do you suppose we could sleep quietly up at the fort, and leave you boys to do all the fighting down here?"

"Take the boats and follow us," said Fred, speaking rapidly. "You'll find Prince Muntion and Nat McMillan prisoners there, and six of the fellows guarding them—they'll explain."

There was no more talk after that; the girls hastily dismounted and gave up their wheels to the boys.

Of course, there was not nearly enough to go around. Those who could not get mounts went down to the boats with the girls.

Fred Fielding led the pursuing party, and Fred was a scorcher, and the big majority of the boys who followed him were just as good riders as himself.

"Bay—Bay—Bay—Baymore!" they cried, as they went bowling down the road.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ATTACK ON THE ROAD.

"Professor Smallman, I try to be a gentleman. You can abuse me all you please while I'm tied up here and helpless, but I shan't answer you back."

There was something in the quiet, dignified way in which Jack Rayburn spoke these words which made Professor Smallman "haul in his horns."

And really he had been abusing the boy shamefully as they rode on down the Baymore road. He had called him a thief over and over again, and he kept right on saying it, until now at Jack's manly rebuke he stopped short.

"Sure, an' I think the lad is right," said Mahony. "There's no sense in lambasting him with your tongue all the while, and he a-sitting there as meek as a spring lamb, an' niver saying a worrud."

"Hold your tongue," snapped the professor. "You've been drinking too much. If you had kept sober and attended to your business there would have been no necessity for all this."

"Right you are, boss, and I don't deny it," retorted Mahony. "But I'm done. After we get to Baymore I wash me hands of this business. I don't believe the lad stole the box at all."

"If you would only let me speak, Mr. Smallman," said Jack, "I could explain to you how the matter stands. I can't believe that you really want to do me an injustice, but you are doing it. I had nothing whatever to do with the stealing of the box, but I can tell you just how it all occurred."

Now, by this time Professor Smallman had cooled down considerably, and had managed to bring his temper somewhat under control.

Common sense told him that he ought to listen to the boy, and he ungraciously told him to go ahead and tell his story, which Jack accordingly did.

"And do you mean to tell me what you say is true?" asked the professor, manifestly impressed.

"It is, every word of it," said Jack, firmly. "Do you suppose for an instant that I would bring the box to you if I had stolen it? Now you know, without my telling you, that I did just that."

"You did; I'm forced to admit it," said Professor Smallman, more graciously. "Jack, I don't want to do you an injustice, but I can't believe that Prince Munton is a thief."

"Nor can I, either," replied Jack. "For the moment I thought so, but now I can't believe it. One thing is certain, though, Prince and Nat McMillan are as bad as they make 'em. When they tied me up to the tree to-night, and tried to make me tell where the box was, they certainly meant to take it. There can't be any doubt about that, and then there's Crazy Lucy's testimony besides."

"Certainly it looks that way, if what you say is true," mused the professor. "Jack, I'm afraid I have wronged you. I have let my temper get the best of me, and it has betrayed me into a display of vindictiveness against you which I am far from feeling. But you must remember that you have done me a great wrong. You have broken up my business—Baymore Academy is ruined; the parents of my pupils will never consent to their children remaining under my charge after what has occurred."

"You mustn't hold me responsible for that, Mr. Smallman. When you turned me out of school I went quietly enough. Was it my fault that all hands followed me? I say no!"

"I can't see it as you do," said the professor; "but I'm willing to reconsider the matter. If the boys and girls will return quietly to Baymore, I am willing to forgive you, and—"

"I don't want your forgiveness, sir. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of. I have tried to act the part of a gentleman from first to last, but I insist upon having my name cleared of this terrible charge you have made against me. That box may have money in it—it probably has, and——"

"Probably has! Why, there's five thousand dollars in it!" cried the professor. "It's money that I've been saving for five years past. I took it out of the bank to pay off the mortgage on the academy, which is due next week. If that money had been lost I should be a ruined man to-night."

Certainly, Professor Smallman was very foolish to thus talk out about his affairs before the man Mahony, who was a person he did not know at all.

In truth, the fellow was but little better than a tramp, having been picked up by Sheriff Cardman when he led his posse down to the old fort.

Earnestly engaged in pleading his own case, Jack had scarcely paid any attention to his companion on the back seat of the surrey, but now as he happened to look up he saw that Mahony was looking at the box which lay on the seat beside the professor with wolfish eyes.

There was something in his expression that startled Jack. The man's look was positively murderous; they were passing over a lonely part of the road where a spur of the bay makes a deep indentation into the land, and were far from any house.

"I think you'd better get your money back into the bank as soon as possible," he hurriedly said, wishing that he could catch the professor's eye.

"So do I," sneered Mahony. "Sure there's bad men around, drunken bums like me who would do a man for a dollar just like that!"

Quick as thought he whipped a blackjack out from under his coat and dealt Professor Smallman a crushing blow over the back of the head.

"Great Scott! What have you done?" gasped Jack, as Smallman, with a deep groan, pitched forward and went over the wheel.

"Shut your head or you'll get the same!" cried Mahony, springing over the seat and seizing the reins. "Five thousand dollars, is it? Well, now, that's mine, an' don't you forget it! You can thank your lucky stars, boy, that your hands are tied."

Thus saying, Mahony pulled in the horse, leaped out of the surrey, and drawing a revolver deliberately shot the poor brute between the eyes, sending him down dead in his tracks.

Then, seizing the cash box, he plunged into the bushes, and ran down the hill toward the bay.

"Help! Murder! Help!" shouted Jack, tugging at the cords which held him a prisoner to the seat.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN HOT PURSUIT.

Some people when striving to help others can do what they are not able to do for themselves.

It was so with Jack Gentleman in this terrible emergency. He had tried more than once to break the cords which held him prisoner, and had come to the conclusion that he could not do it, but he did it now.

Tugging and struggling, he tore his hands free from the surrey, and then by one mighty effort broke the cord which bound them together.

"Help! Murder! Help!" he shouted, for it seemed to him that he had heard voices in the distance. He was sure he could see lights flashing along the road.

Filled with horror and the tragic turn which affairs had

taken, Jack ran back to where Professor Smallman lay face downward in the dust.

"It was his own doings," he thought. "They can't hold me responsible for it! He brought it upon himself!"

Was he dead?

Jack thought so as he bent over him, but he was hardly prepared to be accused of murdering him by his best friends.

"Oh, Jack, what have you done? This is going a step too far."

The words came like a stab to the heart to poor Jack, for it was Fred Fielding who said it.

At the head of the scorchers Fred came whirling up as Jack bent over the fallen man.

"For goodness sake, don't say a thing like that to me, Fred, or I shall go mad!" cried Jack, springing up. "Here, take hold and help! Do something! Do you think I'm a murderer? Quick! The scoundrel has stolen the cash box! He went that way!"

"Pardon me, Jack! I didn't mean it! I——"

"Don't stop to talk, boys! That wretch has done the professor and run off with the cash box. I tell you what we'll do. The man ought to be followed up, but we can't leave him here in the road to die."

"And the horse dead, too!" cried Fred. "Get down to Brightwood's for help, some of you—that's the nearest house. Jack, you and I and the rest will follow the murderer, and we'll catch him, too!"

"No, I can't leave him! I won't! You go, Fred."

"No; you go, Jack Rayburn! You will succeed—you'll get back my money if anyone can."

It was the professor himself who spoke; with a great effort he turned over and pointed to Jack.

"He's not guilty, boys," he gasped, feebly. "He had nothing to do with it. Go, Jack—go! Save my money! Save the school!"

Could Jack resist that appeal? Hardly.

"Six of you fellows stand by the professor!" he cried. "The rest of you follow me!"

Fred Caspar and Will were among those who ran down the bank, following close at Jack's heels.

It was but a short run to the bay, and when they came out on the shore they paused and looked this way and that, but there was nothing to be seen of Mahony. If the fellow had come that way he was certainly not there now, for the bank was clear of bushes along the water's edge. Still, there were places in plenty for him to hide a little further back.

"Don't see anybody around here," said Fred. "Jack, are you sure he came this way?"

"I can only tell you how he started," replied Jack. "But I'm thinking that what the fellow will most likely do is to make for the nearest boat and try to get across the bay."

"That's more than likely," said Will. "But where will he get the boat?"

"There's one at the foot of the hill behind Brightwood's place, ain't there?"

"I believe there is—there used to be."

"Our boats ought to be down in a few moments," said Caspar.

"Here they come now!" cried Gus Penny, as the foremost of the little fleet with a lantern at the bow appeared around Fisher's Point.

In a moment all of the boats were plainly visible in the moonlight. There had been plenty of boys left behind to do the rowing, but they could see that some of the girls were lending a hand, Laura Patterson among the rest.

Prince Munton sat in the stern of the foremost boat, a prisoner, and Nat McMillan was in the next one. At the risk of alarming Mahony, Jack gave the old school cry, and suc-

ceeded in signaling the first boat in which Larry Latham was pulling stroke oar.

Larry pulled ashore promptly.

"Is that you, boys?" he called, as he drew near.

"Yes," shouted Jack. "Keep along shore, all of you! There is trouble here; we're going on ahead; be ready to pull in and get us as soon as we give the word."

"Gee! Why, it's Jack Gentleman!" Larry cried. "What's the trouble when you've got Jack?"

They did not stop to answer, but hurried along the beach toward Brightwood place, running at the top of their speed.

"Go easy now, fellows," said Jack. "We've made noise enough—too much, in fact. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if we'd passed the fellow after all. He may have been listening to every word we've said."

"Too much time has been lost, that's what," replied Fred. "But say, Jack, here's a trail."

"By gracious, you're right! Footprints in the sand!"

"And leading toward Brightwood's. Can it be the man?"

"The fellow was running, whoever he was," said Jack, examining the footprints. "It won't take us long to get to Brightwood's, then we'll know."

But the chase came to an end long before they reached the Brightwood place. Suddenly the footprints turned down to the water's edge, and there vanished.

"A trick!" cried Fred. "He walked in the water to dodge us."

Jack was inclined to think so, too, and they looked on further, but saw no more footprints.

"Let's get back," said Jack. "I believe he found a boat here and pulled out on the bay."

"But where is he?" queried Fred. "There ain't a sign of a boat out there except our own."

"What about that tug?" said Jack.

Several hundred yards out on the bay a tug lay, apparently at anchor. There was a small boat fastened astern.

"It's only put in here for the night," said Fred. "Of course that can't have anything to do with our man."

"I ain't so sure. I don't see a soul on board. Suppose Mahony should be hiding there."

"Oh, you can suppose anything you please," replied Fred, "but I'm sure you are dead wrong; still it's something easy to prove if you care to go to the trouble. It won't take us ten minutes to pull out there."

"I'm going," said Jack, quietly. "See, they are getting up steam."

"That's what," said Caspar. "Shall I hail the boats, Jack?"

"Wave your hat," said Jack. "It's pretty light. I think they can see you, and I don't want to make any more noise than I can help."

Larry caught the signal and the boat turned in toward the shore. Just as it made the turn a man put his head out of the engine-room of the tug and looked in their direction.

"There!" cried Fred. "Did you see?"

"I did," replied Jack.

"Is that your man?"

"It looks like him, but still I wouldn't be sure."

The man was out of sight by this time, the head having been immediately withdrawn from the doorway.

Meanwhile smoke came pouring out of the tug's funnel thicker than ever. That the man was getting steam up was easy to see.

"We are coming aboard, Larry!" cried Jack, as the boat neared the beach. "Is there room for us all?"

"Well, hardly, unless you want to swamp us," laughed Larry. "What in the world is the matter, anyway?"

"The matter is that Professor Smallman has been almost murdered, and there sits the fellow who is responsible for

it," said Jack, sternly, at the same time pointing his finger at Prince Munton. "Come, Prince! You may as well own up now," he added. "The cat's out of the bag. We all know that it was you who stole the cash box from Baymore."

"I didn't! It's a lie!" snarled Prince. "You can't make me say another word."

"Can't, eh?" replied Jack. "We'll see about that! When it comes to a pinch like this I stick at nothing; boys, pass that fellow out here."

"Stop! Stop!" cried Prince, turning pale. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll soon show you," said Jack. "Pass him along, Larry; pitch him into the water if he won't move."

CHAPTER XXII.

JACK READS PRINCE MUNTON A LESSON.

"Pass him along, boys! Pass him along! Don't wait another minute! We've fooled away time enough!"

No boy in Baymore had ever heard Jack Gentleman speak so sternly.

Prince Munton was scared out of his wits and began to blubber like a big bull calf.

"Don't do it! Don't give me up to him, fellows!" he sniveled. "He'll kill me! That's what he'll do!"

"He will, eh? Then let him do it," said Larry Latham. "Whatever Jack says goes. Do you hear?"

They caught Prince and threw him over the side of the boat into the shallow water. It was about up to his waist, but it was pretty cold, and Prince was horribly scared.

He staggered ashore with all possible speed, calling out:

"Don't duck me, fellows! Don't drown me!"

Jack got him by the arm and pulled him up on the beach. Then Fred and the rest came around him.

"I'm going to teach him a lesson that he needs," Jack said, firmly. "Take off your coat and vest, Prince Munton! Be quick!"

Prince sulkily obeyed. He had to—there was no help for it.

Then Jack pulled out from under his coat the very rawhide whip with which Prince had threatened to beat him earlier in the night.

"See this!" he cried. "You remember it! I brought it away with me from the bluff. Prince Munton, it's my turn now!"

He raised the whip above Prince's shoulders, threateningly.

Prince set up a howl and begged for mercy.

Jack lowered his hand and extended the whip toward the frightened boy.

"Here, take it; it's yours," he said. "Prince Munton, I'm a gentleman. I don't beat my schoolmates. You made all this trouble in Baymore Academy; if Professor Smallman dies tonight his death is at your door. If you have a spark of manhood left in you, and I hope you have, you'll confess now. You'll tell all you know about the stolen box, and help us to catch the murdering thief!"

This was Jack Gentleman's little lesson. It was not in the brave boy's nature to take a mean revenge upon this cowardly fellow, who now stood entirely at his mercy.

For a moment everybody was silent.

Prince hung his head and burst into tears.

"Lick him, Jack—lick him! Don't let him off!" several shouted.

But Fred turned the tables by calling out:

"Three cheers for Jack Gentleman! Jack's right! He's a gentleman, every inch of him. He couldn't do a mean thing."

"Hold on, boys! No shouting now!" cried Jack. "Time's up! I've given Prince his little lesson. Pull the boat in closer, Larry, and Prince will get in."

Larry did it at the risk of running aground.

Prince got back into the boat, and put on his coat and vest

without a word. All hands now went aboard the boats, some getting into one and some into another.

"Pull for the tug, now!" ordered Jack, who with Fred, Caspar and Will Barmore had taken his place in Larry's boat.

The start was made immediately. Not as much time had been lost as may be imagined. Jack had watched the tug closely, and knew that the anchor had not yet been raised.

"I'm afraid we are mistaken," he said. "That fellow don't seem to be a bit afraid of our coming, and yet something tells me that we ought to go on."

"We ought," said Prince, in a low voice. "I don't think there is any question but what the man you are after pulled out to the tug."

"Hello!" cried Fred. "What's all this?"

"Stop, Fred," said Jack, quietly. "Prince ain't through yet. He's going to tell us more."

"That's what I am, Jack," said Prince, in the same subdued way. "Boys, I want you all to forgive me if you can, for I'm very wretched. I tell you it don't pay to do as I've done."

There was a sneering shout from some at this, but again Jack interfered.

"Hush!" he said sternly. "Let him speak!"

"I'm going to speak, Jack," continued Prince. "You've read me a lesson, and I mean to show all you fellows that I've got sense enough to take it. Boys, I've been a bad one. My father is a rich man, but he has never allowed me one cent of pocket money since I came to Baymore school. I don't offer that as an excuse for what I've done, but it will help to explain it. I wanted money. I got so that I didn't care how I got it. I did take old Lucy's bag, and I've taken other things, but I'm done now, and—and——"

Here Prince's voice choked. He would have found it difficult to speak, if Jack had not given him an encouraging word.

"Don't take it too much to heart, Prince," he said. "You are only a boy like the rest of us. There's plenty of time to turn over a new leaf. Go on and tell us about the box."

"I will," said Prince. "Boys, I didn't break open the safe at Baymore, as you think I did, but Nat and I happened to see the fellow who did the job, and it's my belief it is the very man we are chasing now. You see, we'd been out down in the town that night. We got out by putting the ladder against the extension as we'd often done before, and were skylarking round, no matter at what, and when we were coming in we saw a light in the library, and just then a man jumped out through the window. He was masked and had the professor's cash box under his arm."

"Gracious! Is this true?" cried Jack, for his interest in Prince's story, like that of every boy in the boat, was becoming intense.

"True, every word of it," said Prince. "Where we made our mistake was in not giving the alarm, for instead of that we jumped on the fellow. He dropped the box and ran. We saw him get into a boat down by the wharf, and pull out on the bay."

"I don't see where your mistake comes in," said Jack. "What else could you do?"

"If we'd given the alarm we wouldn't have done what we did do," replied Prince, hanging his head. "We went back and stole the box ourselves, Jack—at least, I did, for I won't lay the blame on Nat. After I took it we carried it down to the old barn. We were going to hide it, but we got into trouble there, for I dropped a match in the straw, and the barn took fire, and—and—well, we got pretty well scared and changed our minds. People came when they saw the fire. Nat scooted, and after a little I started to take the box back to the library. I meant to leave it there then, Jack. I did,

indeed! Then you came upon me suddenly the way you did, and I ran."

"But you were masked, Prince—you had a handkerchief tied over your face."

"I know it. I was a fool. I was afraid someone would see me and recognize me. When you chased me I sneaked on board the Blackbird. I was sorry then that I hadn't kept the box, for I thought you meant to keep it yourself, Jack, and I made up my mind I'd get it somehow, and get square with you at the same time."

"And that's all?" asked Jack.

"Everything I've got to tell. You know the rest."

"You would have given the box back if you'd got it, Prince."

"No, I wouldn't. I won't deceive you, Jack. I meant to keep it if I got it in my hands again."

"Oh, Prince! I can't believe it of any Baymore boy! I won't!"

Prince hung his head and answered in a voice so low that the boys could hardly hear.

"It's true, Jack. But I'm done. From this day on I turn over a new leaf. I just want to say one word more. The man you describe as the one who struck Professor Smallman I believe to be the man who stole the box."

"He's getting up the anchor on the tug, Jack!" cried Fred, suddenly. "There's the man, now!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE THREE MEN ON THE ISLAND.

Fred's announcement sent the boat forward with a rush.

But too much time had been lost.

They saw the man on the tug drop the anchor on the deck and run for the engine-room.

A moment more and the tug started.

Then the man ran out again, got into the pilot-house, and took the wheel.

"We've missed our chance!" cried Will, as the tug started down the bay.

"Pull! Pull!" shouted Jack. "I won't give up yet! He's trying to run that tug alone. I saw him plain enough last time he crossed the deck. It's Mahony as sure as fate."

The boys pulled with a will, for Jack's word was law and gospel, but at the same time it seemed a hopeless chase.

"It's no earthly use," said Fred, at last. "Jack, we'll have to give it up—don't you see we are falling further and further behind every moment."

Of course Jack saw! Of course he knew that it could not be otherwise, and yet some mysterious instinct seemed to impel him to keep on.

"Just a little longer, fellows!" he cried. "Don't you see he's making for Fox Island? He's steering wild. That fellow don't know his business. Ten to one he'll run the tug on the Needles and then we'll have him cold."

Here was a consideration the boys had never thought of. It gave Jack's persistency a sensible look.

They "buckled down to business," and the boat flew over the water like a bird, leaving the others far behind.

"I wish you fellers would let me take an oar," said Prince. "I want to be doing something to help."

Here again Jack's gentlemanly instincts came in, for he put himself in Prince's position and gave up his own oar to the penitent boy.

The speed of the boat lost nothing by the exchange, and it gave Jack a chance to keep a watch out ahead.

By this time the tug was nearing the Needles. The tide was on the ebb; the most dangerous of all times to attempt to pass in between the island and the rocks.

As the boat was now the boys could not see the Needles,

and in a moment more they lost sight of the tug, for it rounded the point of the island and disappeared from view.

"There!" cried Jack. "She's gone! If we don't see her on the rocks I'll miss my guess. He's hugging the shore and he expects to get through, but he'll never do it in the wide world, unless he knows the channel better than I think he does."

On flew the boat, and in less than five minutes they were around the end of the island. Jack gave a shout.

"There you are, boys! He's on the Needles. We've got him now!"

They thought so—in fact, they were sure of it, but when they came up with the tug, which was hard and fast upon the sunken rocks, there was no one to be seen.

"Pull! Pull for the tug!" cried the persistent Jack. "The first thing we've got to find out is whether he's still on board."

It was easy pulling; the ebb tide ran like a mill race between the Needles and the island; the trouble was to stop when they came alongside the tug.

"Look out he don't shoot!" cried Prince, as Jack laid hold of a gasket.

But Jack never heeded the warning. He made fast and leaped fearlessly on board the tug.

"He shan't go alone, by gracious!" cried Fred, following Jack's example.

"Nor you either!" echoed Will Barmore, and he went up over the side after Fred.

"No one here!" cried Jack, suddenly appearing by the pilot-house. "He's gone ashore on the island, boys. We've got him now if we only show a little pluck."

They crowded back into the boat, and Jack gave the order to pull across the channel. This was not so easy, but by hard work they managed to accomplish it, and landed on the island at some little distance below the Needles.

"Out with you fellows!" cried Jack. "Now comes the tug of war."

The boys scrambled out and pulled the boat up on the pebbly beach.

As yet the other boats were not in sight. All saw that whatever was to be done would have to be done by themselves.

"Make for the cave," said Jack. "Softly now! If he knows the island, and I'll bet you he does, that's where he'll be sure to hide."

Now, Fox Island was, in itself, little more than one big rock, partially covered over with earth, from which a few stunted trees had sprung.

Half way between the beach and the highest point of the island was a deep hole running in under the rock.

This was the cave to which Jack alluded. The boys had been there many times.

Jack led the way, and they ran up over the hill, arming themselves with stones as they went.

They were within a few yards of the mouth of the cave when three men suddenly came out of the darkness directly in front of them.

"Back! Back, you fellows, or we fire!" they shouted, covering the boys with revolvers.

They did not wait for the order to be obeyed, either, for at the same instant three shots rang out upon the night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Look out, boys! They are going to fire!"

It was Prince Munton who shouted the warning.

Perhaps Prince's eyes were sharper than those of his fellow students.

At all events he spoke before the shots came.

The boys ducked and dodged, and let the stones fly at the

three men who jumped back behind the trees, as soon as they discharged their revolvers.

When Jack's clear, ringing voice sounded the cry: "Follow 'em, boys! Follow 'em!" no one ever dreamed that the shots had taken effect.

Picking up stones, as they ran, and flinging them at the flying figures, the boys dashed on up the hill.

No more shots came.

Truth was, only one of the men had a revolver, and that contained but three shots, now all expended; the others had simply presented the stems of two brier pipes which, to the excited imagination of the boys, had appeared like the deadly weapons they were not.

"Head 'em off! Get between them and the cave!" shouted Fred.

"Down them! Down them! There's no fight in them!" cried Jack. "See, there's only one who can run."

He dashed ahead of all the rest, and jumped on the man who had fired the shots, who was running like a deer.

But the others had surrendered before this man and Jack went sprawling upon the ground together.

One got a severe blow with a stone on the side of the head, the other was hit in the leg and brought up with a round turn; both threw up their hands.

"Don't kill us, boys! Don't kill us! We give in!" they cried, as the boys sprang upon them.

"Nothing but two old tramps!" cried Fred, disgustedly, when he saw what ragged, sorry looking subjects they had captured. "Where's Jack? Hold these fellows! I go on!"

"Here! Here! I've got him, boys! Help me quick!" Jack's voice was heard shouting through the darkness.

They ran for the spot and found Jack, with his hands clutching the fellow's throat, with his knee on his breast.

Professor Smallman's cash box was lying beside them on the ground.

"It's Mahony!" cried Prince. "That's the man!"

"Yes, it's the man, and I've got the cash box!" gasped Jack. "Take hold here, boys! I can't keep up here any longer. I'm shot—killed, I think—I——"

Poor Jack! He had spoken his last word for some time to come. To their horror he fell over all in a heap, the blood trickling down under his vest from a severe wound in his side.

"Jack, Jack!" gasped Fred, springing to his assistance.

But Prince showed them that he was not all a coward, for he sprang upon Mahony, who improved the opportunity by trying to get on his feet.

"Help, help, here!" he cried. "This is the man who murdered Professor Smallman, and he's killed Jack Gentleman! He must not escape!"

And help was closer at hand than Prince imagined.

At the same moment there was a rush over the hill from the other side of the island. Lanterns flashed, and a dozen men came dashing down to the assistance of the Baymore boys.

Who were they? Why, Constable Kelly, Dan Conover and others, to be sure.

Word had been given the constable that a gang of thieving tramps were making their headquarters on Fox Island, and he had come out to capture them without any reference whatever to the midnight mission of the Baymore boys.

It was a timely arrival, but the work had been done by these same boys before the constable came.

Of course, Mahony at once surrendered; of course there was a lot of talk and a lot of explaining to be done.

But not one word of all that was said reached the ears of Jack Gentleman.

Everyone thought that Jack's last hour was close at hand.

No one believed that he would ever live to reach Baymore Academy, but he did.

It was a sad party which returned in the boats, and the sadness was but little changed by the Baymore boys and girls discovering that Professor Smallman had been brought back to the academy, and was not much injured after all.

For six weary weeks Jack Rayburn lay hovering between life and death.

At last all danger was past, and one day Jack awoke to life again, for time had all been a blank to him, to find Prince Munton and Fred Fielding sitting by his bedside.

During all those weary weeks Prince had proved devotion itself, and it was only right that he should be one of the first to welcome Jack back to life, and to convey to him the news that the man who had laid him low had been sent to prison for a long term.

As the boy's strength returned, his old friends came about him. Professor Smallman was in the sick-room hourly. He was kindness itself, and could not do enough for Jack.

One day—it was the first on which Jack had been allowed to sit up in bed—the professor entered the room rather hastily.

Fred and Will and Prince were there. Jack and Prince were chatting like old friends.

"Well, well, Jack! How is this?" cried the professor. "Up! Looking better! This is as it should be. My boy, let me say now what I have wanted to say for weeks. Let me thank you for what you did for me. Jack, it was you who saved Baymore Academy. My mortgage is paid, and I am my own master, and let me say right here that I am not the old tyrant. You have taught me a lesson. I try now to be a gentleman, and to treat my boys like gentlemen, which I own I did not do in the days when I turned you out of school.

"No, no! Don't speak yet!" continued the professor, when Jack would have protested against this humilitating admission. "I've got something to add which interests you, my boy. Word has just come to me that your guardian is dead. Jack, that man has been wronging you for years. You are not the pauper I once called you. On the contrary, you are sole heir to an estate valued at over a million, and——"

"Hooray! Hooray for Jack Gentleman!"

Fred, Will and Prince could not restrain themselves, and they burst out into one wild shout.

* * * * *

This is the end.

These events happened only last year, so all we have to say is that Baymore Academy still flourishes, and all our friends are there.

All vote that there is no kinder master in the United States than Professor Smallman, and no better fellow than Prince Munton.

Except one—Jack Gentleman, the boy who was turned out of school.

THE END.

Read "THE CHOSEN SIX; or, THE BOY STUDENT NIHILIST," by Allan Arnold, which will be the next number (584) of "Pluck and Luck."

SPECIAL NOTICE: All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 5, 7, 8, 10 to 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29 to 31, 34 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 48 to 50, 54, 55, 57, 58, 60, 62, 64 to 66, 68, 69, 75, 81, 84 to 86, 89, 92 to 94, 100, 107, 109, 110, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 162, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 212, 265. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order, by return mail.

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NEW YORK, AUGUST 4, 1909

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THINGS OF INTEREST.

An amusing story is told of an Englishman in Paris. After some hours of sightseeing, one day, he lost his way and could not get back to his hotel. He asked first one and then another, but the foreigners apparently did not understand their own language. At last, in sheer disgust, he tore a leaf out of his pocketbook, wrote upon it the name of his hotel, and silently presented it to the next passerby. The man looked at him compassionately, beckoned him to follow, and without a word they proceeded up one street and down another. Finally the wanderer saw the door of his hotel, and forgetting in his relief and gratitude all the difficulties of the language, he turned to his companion and said: "Thank you very much; I am greatly obliged to you." The other stared at him in amazement, and then blurted out: "You duffer, why didn't you speak before? I thought you were deaf and dumb." The good Samaritan was of his own nationality.

El-oued, the "city of a thousand cupolas," lies in the far south of Algeria, upon the edge of Sahara, where sand dunes roll away in undulation after undulation, until they at last blend imperceptibly with the horizon. Situated on the oasis called Souf, this place possesses considerable strategic importance. But of far greater importance to the visitor is its distinctly Oriental charm, which stamps it as apart from all other Algerian cities, overrun as they are with Europeans, and beginning to loom up with factory chimneys and modern buildings. Isabelle Eberhardt, returning lately from a journey through Eastern lands, has recorded her impression of this oasis town thus: "In the midst of an immense plain whose whiteness shades away into a mauve, resting beneath dark shadows of its garden is that great white city. In its pallor, lying in the bosom of this colorless plain, El-oued seems immaterial and translucent, betwixt pulsating solidity of earth and air. Without moving objects, without any smoking chimneys, the city appeared to me like an enchanting vision of ancient Islam, like a milky pearl in this satiny setting of the desert."

As mahogany is among the most costly of woods, it may well be inferred that this material is not very extensively employed in the construction of buildings, etc. A bridge constructed of solid mahogany is, therefore, a real curiosity. Yet there is one, the only one in the world, it is claimed, built of that material. This structure is located in the department

of Palenque, State of Chiapas, Mexico. This district lies in the extreme southwestern part of Mexico, near the boundary line of Guatemala. This mahogany bridge is constructed entirely of that valuable wood, except some iron supports, braces and nails, of course. The bridge spans the Rio Michol, and its total length, including approaches, exceeds 120 feet, while the width is 15 feet. It is used by both teams and pedestrians, and, though somewhat rude and primitive in design, it is substantial in construction. None of the timbers of the flooring were sawed, for in that region there are no saw-mills. Instead, the wood was hewn and split. In that section of old Mexico there are several very large rubber plantations, and mahogany trees are quite common. In clearing away the tropical forests for setting out the young rubber trees the mahogany growths are also cut down and removed. As this wood is quite abundant, some of it was used to build the bridge.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Wife—What is a pretzel? Hub—A pretzel, love, is a cracker with the cramps.

Patrick arrived much the worse for wear. One eye was closed, his nose was broken, and his face looked as though it had been stung by bees. "Glory be!" exclaimed his wife. "Thot Dutchman, Schwartzheimer—'twas him," explained Patrick. "Shame on ye!" exploded his wife without sympathy. "A big shpalpeen the loikes of you to get bate up by a little omadhaun of a Dootchman the size of him! Why——" "Whist, Nora," said Patrick, "don't spake disrespectfully of the dead!"

An official of the Department of the Interior tells of an incident at one of the Government schools for the Indians. A patronizing young woman of Cincinnati was being shown through the institution, when she came upon a fine-looking Indian girl of perhaps sixteen years of age. The Indian girl was hemming napkins, which the girl from Cincinnati watched for some moments in silence. Then said she to the Indian, "Are you civilized?" The Sioux raised her head slowly from her work, and glanced coldly at her interrogator. "No," she replied, as her eyes again sank to her napkins. "Are you?"

After addressing an Edinburgh meeting for ninety minutes Bernard Shaw remarked that the time was a quarter to 10, and he had intended to finish at 9 o'clock. He did not seem in the least fatigued; the audience was also quite fresh, and when the speaker was about to sit down, loud cries of "Go on" were raised on all sides. "Do you really wish me to go on?" Mr. Shaw asked. He was answered by renewed cheering and more shouts of "Go on." Great was the disappointment, therefore, when he replied, "That is the exact point at which an experienced speaker sits down," which he accordingly did.

"In my school days," said a story teller, "we used to have a lecture every Friday afternoon. One day the lecturer was a geologist, and chose Niagara Falls for his topic. He told us about the geological formation of the falls, described the different periods to be traced in the gorge, and then went on to say that the falls were slowly wearing back toward Buffalo and that in the course of some 200,000 years they would be worn back to Erie, Pa., and that the town would be left high and dry. Suddenly one of the girls in my class began to sob convulsively. 'What is the matter?' asked the teacher in alarm. 'Oh,' wailed the girl, 'my sister lives in Erie.' "

A MYSTERIOUS CASE

By KIT CLYDE.

It was a cold, stormy night.

The rain was pouring in torrents, and beat against my office windows with a sound which made me congratulate myself that my work for the day was done.

Suddenly my door-bell rang, and a moment later a tall, well-dressed man entered the room.

"Dr. G——," he said, "I ask you to accompany me to the bedside of a sick friend. I have a carriage in waiting at the door."

I suppose my face must have expressed the dissatisfaction I felt, for the stranger hastened to add:

"It is a case of life and death, doctor, or I would not ask you to leave your house on this tempestuous night."

"I will go with you, sir," I interrupted, rising to my feet.

"Thanks, doctor," added my polite visitor. "Bring your case of surgical instruments with you, for you may have to perform an amputation."

"I am now ready, sir," I said, after a few moment's preparation.

The stranger led the way to a coach which stood by the door.

I entered the vehicle, and the driver immediately whipped up his horses and started off at a rapid pace.

At the same moment my companion drew down the window shades, thus shutting out all view of the streets through which we passed.

I thought nothing of this at the time, however, but leaned back in my seat and closed my eyes.

I had almost fallen asleep, when the carriage stopped and my companion exclaimed, "Here we are, doctor," at the same time opening the door and springing from the vehicle.

I followed him and found myself in front of a low, two-story wooden house, one of the windows of which was dimly lighted.

The street was a lonely one, the house before which the carriage had halted being the only one in sight.

I had not the slightest idea as to what part of the city I was in; the locality in which I found myself was entirely unknown to me.

My conductor threw open the door of the house and led me up a steep, narrow flight of stairs.

Flinging open a door at the head of the stairs, he ushered me into a small room, furnished only with three chairs and a table.

Upon one of the chairs was seated a man, whose face was concealed by a black mask.

As my eyes fell upon this individual I started back in surprise, and a suspicion of foul play flashed across my mind.

"Have no fear, doctor," said the man who had conducted me to this place. "No harm is intended you."

"Where is my patient?" I demanded.

"This is he, doctor."

"Well, what is the matter with him, and why is his face masked?"

"He is in perfect health, and as to your second question, I must refuse to answer it."

"Doctor," said the masked man, arising from his seat, "I have sent for you to request you to amputate my left hand," and he extended that member.

"But there is nothing the matter with your hand," I said.

"True, but I wish it amputated. I know that this request

must appear a singular one to you, but I have a good reason for it—a reason which I am unable to explain."

"I must decline performing the operation," I said.

"Do you mean that, doctor?"

"Certainly I do."

The masked man seized in his right hand a hatchet which lay upon the floor by his side, and brought its keen-edged blade down with great force upon his left wrist, nearly severing it.

"I anticipated your refusal, and prepared for the emergency," he said in unaltered tones. "You cannot now refuse to complete the operation."

I could not help admiring the fellow's wonderful display of nerve, nor could I refuse to perform the operation he requested.

In a few minutes the amputation, which was performed in utter silence, was completed, and I replaced my instruments in their case.

"Accept this as a slight compensation for the great service you have rendered me—a service far greater than you imagine," and the masked man slipped a hundred dollar green-back into my hand.

"Is all done? Are you ready to go?" demanded the man who had accompanied me to the place.

"Quite ready," I replied. "But may I ask——"

"Ask nothing," interrupted my conductor, "for we cannot answer. This way, doctor."

Without another word I followed him down the stairs and into the street.

"I will accompany you to your office," he said, as he followed me into the carriage. "Go ahead, driver."

The carriage started.

In vain I endeavored to trace our route during the homeward drive.

The vehicle made so many turns I soon became bewildered, and gave up the attempt.

Suddenly the carriage stopped.

My companion opened the door, and I stepped out.

"Good-evening, doctor," said the stranger.

The vehicle instantly started at a rattling pace, and was lost in the darkness.

I entered my house half in doubt as to whether my strange adventure had been an actual fact, or a dream.

* * * * *

Ten years passed, and the mystery of the adventure which I have related remained unsolved.

One November night—much such a night as that on which I visited my masked patient—I was hastily summoned to the bedside of Mr. Tracy Stafford, a wealthy bachelor, residing in the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

He had been thrown from his carriage, and was believed to be dying.

I had been acquainted with Mr. Stafford about five years, and I never met him without being reminded of my masked patient, for the reason that he, too, had lost his left hand.

I hastened to the millionaire's bedside and found that he was, indeed, dying.

He implored me to tell him the exact truth regarding his condition, and I did so.

"And you are certain that there is no hope?" he demanded.

"None, Mr. Stafford."

"I am unprepared to die, Dr. G——. How can I face my Maker with that terrible crime upon my soul? Doctor, I must tell you all. I—I am a murderer."

"Calm yourself, Mr. Stafford," I interposed, startled by the terrible agitation which he manifested.

"I cannot die without confessing it," he continued, not noticing my interruption. "Dr. G——, I have lived a lie for the past ten years. I have sold my immortal soul for gold, and now I must pay the price of my madness."

He paused a moment and then asked:

"Dr. G——, do you know where you and I first met?"

"Yes. In this room, about five years ago, I think," I replied.

"You are wrong, doctor. Our first meeting took place ten years ago in a house on Seventy-second street, and on that occasion you amputated my left hand."

"Is it possible," I exclaimed, "that you were——"

"I was the masked man upon whom you performed that operation, under such strange circumstances," he replied.

"But listen, doctor," he continued, "to my story. It is of the utmost importance that I should make a confession before I die. Be seated."

I seated myself by his side, after administering to him a draught of cordial, which had the effect of bestowing upon him an artificial strength for the time.

"Dr. G——," he began, "I am not Tracy Stafford. This is a startling statement, but I will soon explain it.

"My real name is Jasper Delavan.

"Ten years ago I was working in the California gold mines with my brother Martin.

"Constant ill-luck attended us; it seemed that everything we attempted was destined to fail.

"Among our companions was a young fellow of about my age, and resembling me in height, build and general appearance, who called himself Dick Brown.

"He was the most intimate friend of my brother and myself.

This man had lost his left hand.

"One morning Dick Brown rushed into our tent, exclaiming:

'Boys, congratulate me; my fortune's made!'

"'Have you struck a lead?' we demanded.

"'Yes,' he replied, 'but not the kind you mean. Boys, I'll tell you my story. My real name is Tracy Stafford. I was always a wild boy, and when I was twelve years old I ran away from my home in Boston. That was fourteen years ago, nearly, and since that day I haven't seen or heard from my folks until just now. About five minutes ago I read in a Frisco paper that my father had died leaving a fortune of over a million dollars to his missing son—that's me—if he could be found. I start for Boston at once, and I want you two fellows to go with me. You've always dealt squarely with me, and you're the only men in the camp I care a cent for. I want to give you a lift if you'll let me, and if you'll go home with me I'll set you up in a biz that'll pay you better than staying here. What do you say?'

"Well, we accepted his offer and started with him for Boston.

"In those days a journey from California to Boston was not what it is now, you know.

"My brother and I had plenty of time on the route to mature the infamous plot which we carried into execution—a plot by which I possessed myself of Stafford's name and fortune.

"We murdered Tracy Stafford on the plains, and robbed him of all the papers by which his identity was to have been proved.

"I was, as I have said, of about his size and height; but before I could present myself to his family I must sacrifice my left hand, for Stafford had lost his long before he left his home.

"On my arrival at New York I had my left hand amputated.

"You were the surgeon who performed the operation, and the man who summoned you was my brother, well disguised.

"The house in which you found me was one which I hired for the occasion.

"My plan succeeded.

"For ten years I have lived this life of deceit, sharing with my brother and accomplice my ill-gotten gains.

"Two years ago my brother died, and I was left to bear my guilty secret alone.

"Now, doctor, you know all.

"Make my confession public when I am gone, and see that the property is restored to those to whom it rightly belongs, the relatives of the man who died by my hand."

An hour later Joseph Delevan died.

His startling confession made a great sensation in the circles in which he had so long moved, but after a time the excitement died out; and the brilliant and fascinating Tracy Stafford is now almost forgotten.

A POOR TOWN FOR BUSINESS

He was a red-nosed, wild-eyed man from the head waters of Sage Run, and looked as if he had not been in town since oil was discovered. His rusty pants were several inches too short for him, and he carried half a dozen coon skins in his hand.

At the postoffice corner he met a South Side lady, and stopping her by holding the bunch of hides before her face, said:

"Can't I sell you something nice to make a set of furs out of?"

The lady screamed, and shot across to the other side of the street.

"Now, what's the matter with Hanner?" remarked the red-nosed man as the lady disappeared in a door opposite.

A moment later the man veered into a bank, and threw his hides down at the cashier's window.

"Got some A No. 1 coon skins here that I'll sell cheap. Not a scratch of a tooth on any of 'em. Ketched every one of 'em in a box trap."

"We have no use for them," said the president, politely, as he cast an oblique glance at the goods.

"They'll make you a nice vest," said the red-nosed man. "Two hides'll make you a vest, and one'll make you a cap that'll wear you as long as you live."

"My dear sir," replied the president, somewhat confused, "we don't want hides here. Take them elsewhere, please!"

"Mebbe your wife would like a set of furs, and these is——"

"Take the blamed things out of this," exclaimed the exasperated banker. "They smell like a slaughter-house."

"I'll take a dollar for the lot."

"The people next door buy coon skins," put in the cashier. "Take them in there; take them uptown; take them downtown; take them across the river; take them——"

"Gimme fifty cents for the lot," persisted the red-nosed man.

"If you don't get out of this I'll kick your head off," yelled the infuriated president.

"I'll take thirty cents for the six," said the red-nosed man. "D'ye say the word?" and he dangled the bunch by the tail.

The president started for the outside. The man with the skins started for the sidewalk, and after having reached it he paused and said:

"And this is the boasted Oil City, is it? Grea-a-at Godfrey! If seal skin and sable were selling for a cent a carload, the hull town couldn't buy the sand-papered end of a rat's tail."

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